Adopt a Soldier

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Adopt a Soldier

by AtticusCrete

Summary

When Abigail Graham joins the Adopt a Soldier Program at school she and her father expect some nice letters and maybe some photos. Colonel Lecter, serving overseas, doesn't want to see a little girl disappointed and writes back.

What happens changes everybody's lives.

Notes

Thanks to @hannigramprompts for the "Adopt a Soldier AU" premise

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 1

Abigail holds her picture up to her daddy,

"Look! Look! I drew Winston and me and you and Buster"

Will dries his hands on a small towel and comes over to the kitchen table. As he dumps the towel on the table he sits beside his daughter on the bench and laughs,

"Scootch up Abs, Now, which one in Winston and which one is me"

"Silly daddy! Winston has blonde hair and yours is brown!"

She reaches over and rubs her father's head. Definitely brown.

"And that's the sole difference between me and the dog Abs? I'm not sure about that at all"

"It is just the hair. You've got clothes too. Look I've put your best shirt in the picture. It's the nicest"

Will smiles, Abigail loves the blue shirt very much. She's just occasionally taken it to bed to cuddle if she's been feeling poorly.

"Yes it is. Good picture Abigail. Do you want it to go on the wall or does it have to go to school?"

Abigail smiles a broad grin, she's missing just one tooth, lower left.

"It's not really homework it's our project"

Will nods, Miss Bloom had talked to all the parents about the adopt a soldier scheme she was encouraging the kids to get involved in. Abigail oscillates between keen and a bit disappointed. Quite a few of her classmates have been adopted but so far she hasn't been picked by anyone at the other end. Will hopes the phase will either pass or someone will choose his little girl soon. She needs positive interactions with adults not apparent rejection.

"Are you going to write a letter with it?"

Abigail sucks the end of the pencil she is holding,

"I could do, can you help me, I'd like to just draw a picture of you and me?"

"Self portrait of artist with father?"

Abi giggles and nods,

"Alright then, let's get a mirror and have a go. We can do it together. Why not take this one in tomorrow and we'll get to work on the other one?"

She slides off the bench and goes to her own room bringing back a mirror on a stand,

"Can we start this? What do we do? I haven't seen you drawing daddy. Can you draw?"

Will smiles, he's got a whole case of drawings he did when she was very little, when her mom was still around. But after she was gone? Hard to keep up the art with a small, lively and active little girl.

"I can draw a bit. Shall I show you how to work out the best place to put our faces on the paper?"

They spend half an hour drawing and at the end they have the rough of two heads leaning together and smiling. Will shows Abigail how to really look at the mirror and draw what is there rather than what you think is there.

"In the mirror Abs we don't see ourselves how we really look. It's all the other way round. You know your parting is on the left side?"

She nods, looks down at her hands, if she holds them out flat with her fingers together and her thumbs at right angles her left hand has a big L between her fingers and thumb. She holds her hand up,

"This side? This side is left?"

"It is. Good job. And you right with your write though not everyone does"

"And write and right are not spelled the same"

Will smiles a quick bright smile,

"You're amazing. Is it time for bed?"

Abigail turns to look at the clock on the cooker, an old analogue one,

"It's 8:15 we're a bit late. Naughty daddy!"

"Naughty daddy indeed. Right wash wash washi wash"

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Later that evening Will looks down at Abigail. His lovely girl. Quietly he goes back to the kitchen and brings back a pad and pencil. He spends about an hour drawing before putting all the art things away. He looks at her drawing of them and the dogs. He and Winston look very very similar. Except for the shirt.

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In the morning there is the usual rush and Will's picture of Abigail ends up in the same envelope as her picture of them. At school Miss Bloom sees the two pictures together and smiles, Will Graham is a nice man. She hasn't enquired too closely about their past. Something sad there though. Something painful. Still, Abigail is doing well and is clearly content. Hopefully she's get a reply soon, she claps her hands and her class of seven year olds sit up and pay attention.

"Letters today. If any of you have done drawings we can put a letter in with them and send them as a nice care package. Alright? How do we start a letter?"

A chorus of hands fly up and some phrases are written carefully in uncials across the big white board. At her table Abigail carefully sticks her tongue between her teeth and makes a start,

Dear solider,

My daddy and I did a drawing for you. I hope you like it. It has our dogs in it too. My daddy said I should say that he is the one wearing the blue shirt and has brown hair. The blonde haired person is our dog Winston. I know he isn't really a person. But he is our family.

Our other dog is buster. He doesn't look like daddy. Daddy says buster and me are like brother and sister. I think that means I am noughty. But he's only joking. He laughed when he said it. So that means he was being funny. I like it when he laughs. We are doing another proper drawing just of daddy and me. If you like I can send it to you?

Our teacher says we should ask if you are ok? I hope you are ok. I think you're brave. It makes me a bit scared. Daddy says the reason you're at a war is complicated. I'm very sorry. I hope you can make it nicer. If you want to write to me you can. Bye. Miss Bloom told me how to spell complicated. It's too big for me. Bye again.

Yours sincerely
Abigail Graham.

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Over the next two weeks Abigail and Will regularly spend some time adding to their joint picture. She does other drawings too and eventually Will buys a file they can go in. Then they buy lots of stickers to cover the file.

At school one morning there is a big box of letters come for the children in that year group. As Alana Bloom goes through the box she's relieved and glad to find a padded envelope with Abigail's name on it. She adds that to the pile for other children in her class. During the afternoon session she hands out envelopes and letters and the class is soon busy with different bits of a big big poster they're going to send as a joint effort.

When Will comes to collect her that afternoon she is clutching the unopened envelope to her chest.

"Daddy! Daddy. Someone wrote. Look look!"

"Hey curly girlie, you haven't opened it?"

"I wanted to show you first. We can open it at home. Winston and Buster can see then too!"

"You're completely right. Come on then. Are we getting eggplant and tomatos on the way home?"

"Can we have ratatouille?"

"Yes we can, what else do we need for that?"

"Peppers and mushrooms and oregano and pepper and onions and zucchin and salt and pepper. I said pepper three times. We only need two kinds of pepper"

"Good enough. Come on then. Look! I even remembered a shopping bag this time!"

He holds out a nylon bag with Japanese cranes on it. It was from their friend Beverly from some museum.

"Well done daddy. We have to save the planet"

"You're right sweetie. Yes we do"

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Late that night after Abigail has gone to bed, the dogs are fed, walked, exhausted and snoozing, the dishes washed and stacked, the laundry done, packed lunches made for the following day, the garbage put out, Will allows himself a thimbleful of whisky in some water. He gets out the letters and pictures Abigail was sent.

"Dear Miss Graham,

Thank you for the lovely picture. Your family is very nice indeed. Your daddy's shirt is just the right shade of blue, and it does help to tell him apart from Winston who is a fine looking fellow. Buster looks very mischievous. I can't believe you can be any where near as naughty but I must believe your daddy mustn't I?

I am quite well thank you. You're daddy is right it is complicated. That's clever of him. Sometimes people act like war is easy to understand. But I think you know too that it's not very easy to explain always.

Well done for asking Miss Bloom about spelling. Sometimes it's quite alright to ask for help. Sometimes we try to do things on our own and that's alright too. But it's always alright to ask. Usually someone will help.

I would be very glad to receive your picture of you and your daddy. A self portrait! Can you tell your daddy I liked the picture he did of you as well as now I can exactly see who I am writing to. I'd be very glad to hear more about Winston and naughty Buster too.

Yours sincerely,

Hannibal Lecter

The letter is on headed paper and Will has to admit to himself he's mildly impressed by both the rank and the effort the guy has put in. Kind of him. And Abigail is over the moon about it. Something for her to focus on and cheer her up. The autumn and Christmas holidays are always hard. Will sighs. Carefully folds the letter away, looks again at the drawing of tents and men lounging in chairs and someone drinking coffee, and smiles. Very kind of Hannibal.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 2

Hannibal smiles at the care package before he's even opened it. He hangs left out of the comms area and heads for one of the officer's mess tents. Once inside he exchanges some words with one of his juniors and grabs a coffee and some cookies. He doesn't look too carefully at the cookies.

As he upends the envelope he considers how much more he's getting out of this than he'd thought likely. And really it was only because no one else had picked the little girl and he didn't want her to be disappointed. Now though? He looks forwards to the weekly 'cares' as she calls them.

Dear Hannibal,

I hope you are ok. We are very well. I have lots of cares for you in this care package. I did a story about Buster and Winston and a pumpkin. Then there is a photo of me for Halloween. Daddy helped me make the costume. It's a bit blurry because he was laughing so much when he took it. The lady with me is my friend Beverly she works with daddy. Then there are some more of my pictures. The best one is the one that goes with the story. I hope you like it very much. We are practising paragraphs at school, but I don't know when to put one yet.

Daddy has sent you a picture too. It is of me and Beverley and her niece Lily. Lily is one of my best friends but we don't go to school at the same place. We had to make a copy of it because Beverly likes it so much. She wants to give it to her lady friend.

I hope you have a nice Halloween. Daddy says you might get to have some candy but you might not so he let me put some in here. He said chocolate might melt in the post so it's just sweeties. I hope that's alright?

Thank you for writing to us. It's my birthday in November but it's a bit sad sometimes. So I like that we have letters and pictures to get from you. Did you do the drawings you sent last time. Daddy said they are very good. We have put them in a big frame and he says he's matted them. I don't know what that means, but they have some special cardboard around them so they look extra good.

Did you have the day off you were waiting for. I hope it was nice?

Yours sincerely,

Abigail (Graham)

On another piece of paper is the short story about Buster and Winston. She probably had some help but it's still very sweet.

'Buster told Winston that they couldn't have a big pumpkin for Halloween. Winston was very sad about it. He likes pumpkin. Why can't we have a big pumpkin? He asked Buster. Buster said it was because he'd already been to the shops and had got twenty little ones. Winston was very happy. He doesn't mind if they are big or small. Pumpkins are delicious. He likes pumpkin pie the best. Buster likes pumpkin pie too. They are best friends. The end'

The picture of Abigail and her friend Beverly is very entertaining and is a Polaroid. Hannibal can almost imagine them in the kitchen just about glimpsed in the background, Abigail, also dressed as a pumpkin, with Beverly standing beside her with a very large wooden knife and fork pretending to

eat her. He can imagine Abigail's daddy laughing as he clicks the shutter and all of them gathering round to see the picture. Watching as it develops.

The drawing of Winston and Buster is a delight and Abigail must be practising as she has caught a naughty expression on Buster's face very well. The candy looks pink and horrible but Hannibal knows he will eat it and tell her all about it next time he writes.

The drawing from Will is something else again.

Abigail glows. Her friend Lily, maybe South East Asian American is enchanting. Beverly has her arm round them both, with her head a little behind and above theirs. It's a well composed picture, a beautiful drawing. Hannibal quite understands that she would want a copy. It's kind of them to send him the original. Very kind. There's a note in with it too.

Dear Colonel Lecter,

Thank you for taking the time and effort for Abigail. It means a lot to her. I appreciate it very much. Of course I do, I'm her daddy. Please don't feel you have to write weekly. Abigail understands that sometimes you must be occupied. She wants to watch the news with me sometimes. So that she understands better. I'm trying to ensure she understands enough but not too much.

We've had a slightly difficult time of it. Obviously nothing compared to the things you must be facing. But she's a brave little girl and I appreciate your good sense in what you say and show her and what you don't.

Let me know if this is all a bit much? She'd send you the moon if she could!

Sincerely,

Will Graham

Hannibal re-reads the letter a couple of times and then folds everything away into the envelope again. He glances at his watch. He's just got time to drop this back at his tent and then he must go to a scheduling meeting. He rolls his shoulders. And later he must go to the gym or for a run or something.

On his walk back he's already beginning to compose the letter he might write to Abigail. And maybe a note for her father too. And he must think of a way to ask about both the sadness and what would be appropriate for Abigail as a small birthday gift. There are some lovely things with embroidery in the local souks. Maybe a little bag or some slippers. He thinks back to when his sister was small. What she would have liked at that age.

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Adopt a Soldier AU Part 3

Abigail is humming with excitement, the letter came to their home whilst she was at school and Will had told her about it when he collected her.

"Has it got proper stamps? Has it got the army stamps? Can we keep them? Did you open It? You waited didn't you? Is it squashy? Did you shake it? Did it make a noise?"

"Yes. No. Yes. No. Yes. Yes. No. I don't know"

Abigail carefully works out the order of her daddy's answers and smiles even more. Her lower tooth is growing back in, the gap is almost filled. Will reckons she's got two to go now. She's practically skipping, pulling on his hand.

Once home she washes her hands first and drinks her juice and is then given the package. She sits at the table and puts it down in front of her. Then she opens it very very carefully. Inside there is another envelope. Maybe a birthday card. There's an envelope with Will's name on it which he accepts from her and puts to one side, there's a squishy packet done up in fancy paper with a sequinned ribbon round it and a less squishy packet also in fancy paper. Then there's a card backed envelope. Abigail lines them up beside each other.

"Can I open them now?"

"Of course. Or you can save them for the weekend"

She chews her lip. Will has to smile. She looks so like her mother when she does that. Or like her mother did.

"I'm going to open my card. I think it's a card. You can open your letter, and I will open the other envelope and one of the presents. Did you tell Hannibal it was my birthday?"

"You did you muppet"

She frowns,

"I forgot. Was that alright? It's rude to ask for things."

"It was alright. Hannibal asked me if it was possible to send you something in his last letter. I said he could. So it's ok. I'd have said if I thought you were being rude Abs"

"Thank you daddy. What else did you say to Hannibal?"

"Mostly I thanked Colonel Lecter for his letters and his drawings. He talked a bit about a big project they are doing and I asked him about his family. He isn't from America originally. Though he's been here a long time"

"A very long time?"

"Quite long. Longer than you've been around"

She pauses then,

"Is he bigger or smaller than you daddy?"

"I think you mean older or younger?"

She nods,

"Yes, exactly."

"I'd guess a bit older. But it's hard to tell. He's a Colonel. That's quite important. So he's not little, or young!"

She nods, and opens her card, she laughs and then turns it round to show her father, a drawing of Buster and Winston wearing party hats with Abigail in the middle. Wearing a puppy nose.

"It's all of us! Isn't he clever"

Will grins at her,

"Yes he is. He's very clever. Are you going to open the others?"

"Your turn, your turn!"

Will smiles,

"Alright, I'll make something else for us to drink first then you can drink it and start your thank you letter. Ok?"

She nods eagerly and he makes some squash in tall glasses. At the bottom are hello kitty ice cubes in coloured frozen juice. Hello Kitty is an abomination he has let into the house on sufferance. Abigail insists it is to balance out all the doggy things they have. He can't fault her logic. When they both have drinks and she is busy with her own letter he opens his,

Dear Will,

Thank you for the letter and the pictures and everything really. I understand about Abigail. I have a younger sister and can remember what THAT was like every clearly! How intolerant teenage boys are? Or perhaps you were as kind then as you are now?

The latest round of activity is difficult. I'm hoping there will be some let up soon. Or else we shall have no down time this side of the holidays. It's possible we shall get some leave some time in the new year. But I don't hold out any hopes. I'll know more in a week or two. Which I have to say, if it didn't sound quite do fatalistic is usually famous last words. Not those kind of last words!

I am now the envy of several of my colleagues. Not only do I have personalised stories and pictures with which to adorn the tent but Abigail's pictures of the camp has been chosen for the next month's newsletter. So it will be seen by a few thousand soldiers and their families back home. I hope she's proud. Or something suitably modest! As I'm sure you'd encourage her to be.

How is your work going? If I may say so you sounded a little over stretched last time you wrote. I'm glad to hear about the range of interesting people and support you have. Just what exactly is a "preller"? Nobody can tell me!

There's no easing into a conversation about loss so I shall simply say I'm sorry about Abigail's mother. That's it. No platitudes about grief. Or sorrows borne. Or time healing. Loss is loss, and grief is a thing with feathers. The best I can do I suppose is send you upholding and my own kind of care. There it is. A small thing, but sincerely meant.

Here at least we know it might come. We don't want it of course. But we know the shape of it. We've sent home three injured men this month alone. Two very cheery fellows and one quiet lad who is barely known. I never can be sure what will happen when they get back? Love? Support? Alienation? It's a hard thing.

But I'm grinding on. Enclosed as by now I'm sure you will know are some small things for Abigail for her birthday. I have made a good friend of a woman and her two daughters in the local market. They all do embroidery. If you need anything embroidered, and I do mean anything, they can help. Dog coats? preller covers? A waistcoat for Beverly, a coat? A house cover? Anything! I've already been talked into several things I fear I shall regret.

I think you plan to hold the party on Saturday afternoon, yes? I might manage a very quick five minute Skype. We're a lot of hours ahead but as long as nothing stupid happens here I can almost certainly arrange it. Would she like that do you think? The others in her class who have adopted a soldier are attending? Yes? I might persuade some of their soldiers to come and sing a chorus of happy birthday too? Let me know. I've attached my Sergeant at Arm's email, he can fix it up. Six thirty your time?

Well, the bell is ringing for what we're politely calling supper, and I must change and be entertaining. Visiting high-up. I can imagine you'd be delighted for the opportunity to have his ear. I'm not so sure. Last time he threw up on my shoes.

With regrets, sequins, which by the way get everywhere at most inconvenient moments, and regards,

Hannibal Lecter

Will smiles. It's a good letter. They all are. And for sure he's noted the momentary pang he experiences when he turns a page and realises there's only a few paragraphs left. Damn. He's worse than Abigail. The moon? Maybe a whole galaxy!

"Oh daddy! Look! Look!"

Abigail has undone the fancy paper and now has a beautiful dark blue and turquoise silk dress with sequins and rich stiff embroidery. It's intentionally slightly large so it will last her a little while. Will had sent Hannibal her measurements which he'd taken when she was fast asleep. It had felt like a fine conspiracy. Now it is for sure. He must take some pictures at her birthday party on Saturday. Though the possibility of a Skype conversation is an excellent one. Better see what the Sargeant says.

"Do you want to try it on now?"

"No. Thank you. I'd rather wait. Can we hang it somewhere nice? Did Hannibal write you a good letter? I've done some of my answer. Do you like it?"

She holds out the paper and he glances down, she's a good girl. Even if her paragraphs are a little random. He frowns. What is that?

Adopt a Soldier Part 4

On the day of the party Will sets his laptop up in the office. If they manage to make a connection there's a chair for Abi facing the screen and space for all her friends behind her. There are only eight coming plus Beverly, Brian and Jimmy, the famous 'preller' so though it'll be a squeeze it should work.

As it gets closer to 6:30 Will really hopes it works and he knows that it's as much for him as it is for her really. Though no way is he saying it out loud. He did notice slightly to his embarrassment that he'd tidied the shelves and wall space that could be seen from the laptop camera on the screen. Hopefully no one else has noticed.

Just after six thirty all the children are drinking juice in quiet anticipation. Then the call signal goes and there are squeaks and a rush. Two glasses fall casualty. But they're plastic so it's not the end of the world. Abigail pushes the mouse around and then suddenly all the children can see a group of ten soldiers standing in a rough circle wearing casual fatigues in the desert camo design. Sitting in front and to one side is Hannibal, he turns to the screen and waves. There's a very slight delay and then they hear him clearly,

"Abigail Graham! Abigail, Happy happy birthday, we've got a short song for you."

He turns to the group,

"On the click, one two"

He clicks his fingers and the group break into a four part version of happy birthday, they sing two verses and at the end one of the men steps forwards and does the thing where there are three cheers. One of the women steps forwards then and says,

"Abigail Graham! Happy birthday. We're all soldiers who've been adopted. One two three guys"

She clicks her fingers and all the soldiers pull out pieces of paper with a child's name written in large letters on it. There are grins and one after the other the soldiers say the name of the child and says hello or hi, or ola. All of Abigail's friends have an adopted soldier. This is the first time most of them have seen them in real life, or at least in real time. There's a lot of happy laughing.

The first soldier steps forwards again,

"Miss Graham! A happy birthday to you. With love from all of us in camp. Awesome job guys. We're eating cake here on your behalf that you dad got made!"

One of the others opens a cardboard cake box and inside there's a cake that says 'Happy Birthday Abi'

Abigail is almost crying when the camera pans back to Hannibal,

"Happy Birthday Abigail. You and your friends have made us very happy. We hope you have a lovely party and a lovely day."

In the background there's a siren and Hannibal glances round at the others,

"Alright then. That's your call. We'll eat the cake later"

He turns back to the camera,

"Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I'm sorry it's not longer. But it's like at school when the bell goes you have to show up for roll call. Thank you Abigail."

Abigail reaches for the screen as though to hug it,

"Thank you, thank you Hannibal. Be careful, be careful. We love you."

She kisses the screen and then looks around at her daddy. He carefully closes the laptop.

"Will they be alright?"

Will smiles at her,

"Did they look like a bunch of organised guys or not?

The children nod keenly. Yes they did.

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Late that evening after the children have gone and Abigail has gone reluctantly to bed, Brian, Jimmy and Bev sit with Will in the kitchen.

"Will they let you know if they're ok?"

He blinks,

"It's not really like that. We usually all write to each other. Sometimes the letters overlap. Sometimes not. It depends. We've never had a Skype before. I think it was difficult to fix for a suitable time here when Hannibal could get everyone together."

"He's got to be their CO doesn't he?"

"Sure, he's pretty high up on the totem pole"

"Can you email him"

"Look guys. It'll be fine. They do this all the time, we just happened to see it in real life that's all. Come on. We should eat the rest of the cake and please I beg of you eat some of the jello. I can't face it and Buster always tries to get at it"

Everyone agrees, but his three friends can't help but notice that Will glances at the laptop once or twice. When they're gone he watches it for a bit and then gives up pretending and slides into the chair next to his desk. There are no ims on Skype so he checks his email. There's one timed from fifty minutes ago from Hannibal's Sergeant.

>Dr Graham, the Colonel asked me to let you know everyone is alright. It was just a small thing. False alarm almost. Thanks so much for agreeing. It meant a lot to the guys here. We've been trying to promote the Adopt a Soldier scheme, especially amongst those who don't have much family. It's made a real difference to some of the guys. You made our day. Actually our week. And the cake

was great too! The Colonel is sorry not to have been able to email himself. He's a bit busy (he's always a bit busy!) so I hope that's ok. Sincerely, Tobias Budge. Sergeant at Arms.<

Will takes a deep breath, swallows hard. Shit. This is much more difficult than he'd even begun to anticipate. He is in over his head. Oh god.

>Sergeant Budge, thank you. Abigail will be so relieved (I am too). She had a perfect day and the Skype call was just the best thing possible for her. Even the dramatic finish! The other children were over the moon to be included and to see their soldiers. They were very proud. Please thank Colonel Lecter. For everything. Sincerely Will Graham<

When he goes to bed he lies down in the dark and thinks about Hannibal sitting there in fatigues, sandy silver hair parted and a fringe swept to one side, some silvery stubble, the command in his voice, everyone shifting to attention, his cool control. God.

Will had only seen a small picture before. Something one of his men took when they had a day off and Hannibal had sat wearing a straw hat in front of a body of water painting at an easel. Hannibal and Abigail had exchanged pictures of them drawing, as well as the picture they were drawing when the photo was taken.

Will closes his eyes. Thinks about Hannibal's voice. Thinks about the click of his fingers. Thinks about the affection in the eyes of his soldiers. Thinks about Abigail telling Hannibal they loved him.

Thinks about the siren going off and the absolute desperate relief of knowing they're all ok. And of what Hannibal had said in his last letter about the three injured men. He thinks about loneliness and friendship and love and separation. Grief is indeed a thing with wings.

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In the morning he reassures Abigail over breakfast that everyone is alright, she only believes it when she sees Sergeant Budge's email. But goes off to school happily confident and trusting. He shakes his head a little. Maybe only love hurts like this?

And damn if that isn't the truth. He's half in love. Oh that's no good. No good at all. Oh dear. No. He had better say something. What though? All the longing and the yearning tied up in ink and paper and trusted to the post? Maybe that's the best he can do? For now. He takes a few deep breaths and gets ready for another challenging day at his own work.

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My dear Will,

I know it's hard. I know it is. We'll get some leave just after Christmas. I'm almost certain. I know you need more certainty. I can't give you that. But I can say that I will be there as soon as I can. I'll be able to swing five days. In effect that's three as it's just over 24 hours each way. Please. Please don't decide anything before then.

Hannibal

Will looks at the card, reads it again. Puts it down again. Re-reads it. Then puts it back in the envelope and stuffs it into his work bag. He can't think about it right this second. School first. Then

work. Then. God. He gets the card out again and re-reads it. Damn. He pushes it inside once more when Abi comes to the table,

"Did a package come? I heard the door bell. Did it?"

Will pushes the envelope to her, it's been less than a week since the party, Hannibal must have posted it almost the second he got Will's letter and Abigail's thank you card. It's come by courier, some army thing. Inside is a letter for her, a drawing of the impromptu birthday chorus - someone must have taken a photo and Hannibal done a line drawing from it, a picture of the empty birthday cake box with lots of crumbs in the bottom, someone has scrawled the words 'delicious' in sharpie across it. Will is reasonably sure Abigail will want to frame it. Abigail eats her breakfast,

"Can you tie my hair in plaits? I've got birthday bobbles still"

Jimmy gave her a box of 100 elastics in a clear plastic box for her birthday, she seems to have already lost about a quarter of them. Will thinks they might be with the socks she also manages to lose.

"Of course I can. Just the two or maybe six?"

"Just two daddy thank you. I know I could have six but two is better. Did Hannibal write to you too?"

"He did. He might manage to visit some time just after Christmas. Not for long. Don't get too excited. Would you like him to come?"

Abigail looks at her daddy. She understands there is something grown up going on that she doesn't quite understand. She knows her daddy is worried. Maybe about her. Maybe about Hannibal. But he likes him as well. So that's a bit odd. Maybe he's worried that Hannibal will go away forever? Like mummy did? She reaches out and holds her daddy's hand.

"It'd be nice if he could come and see us. Then he wouldn't have to wonder what it's like here when he writes. And we could see he really is ok. He's nice daddy. And he likes Buster and Winston and they'd like to meet him too. We could ask Santa to leave something for him as well. Couldn't we?"

Will smiles at her,

"Yes of course we could. I'll tell him to come if he gets the chance. We have to remember it might change, not because he doesn't want to come but because he's busy and it's difficult there. You understand?"

She nods seriously at him and then smiles,

"I do understand. Definitely. Can we get him a puppy? I think he'd like that?"

Will sighs, oh to be eight when things can be solved by puppies. He thinks of the card in the bottom of his bag. Maybe not puppies. But something.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 5

Hannibal tries hard not to rush to the comms tent. He manages a slow trot. And is then stopped at the entrance by one of the local interpreters. They have a short conversation and Hannibal has to be extremely persuasive to get into the tent before the desk closes and without pissing the guy off.

Behind the table the private salutes,

"Sir. Padded package for you. It's been scanned. Everything A ok, Sir"

"Thank you. Shall I sign for it?"

The private hands over a pen and Hannibal flashes her a smile, she ducks a grin back. Pretty much everyone likes Colonel Lecter and there are rumours circulating about some kind of romance by letter that he's engaged in. She really hopes it's true.

He tears the tab across the top and walks towards the exit of the tent. He stops just inside the doorway. Keen to see the contents. Inside there's a parcel wrapped in Christmas paper and a card and maybe some letters too. He takes a deep breath. More from the relief if anything. He pulls the letters out. One from Abigail and one from Will, he scans the one from Abigail and smiles.

Outside there's an almighty bang and flash and the next thing Hannibal knows he is opening his eyes and looking up at the private who'd been behind the desk. She's clearly speaking but it's just her mouth opening and closing and he can't hear anything. Somehow he's lying on the sandy ground still inside the tent.

The Private helps the Colonel up when he extends his hand to her,

"I'm alright. It was just the blast. I can't hear anything. Damn. Take the envelop back will you. I don't want to lose it. There will be things to go and sort out. Are you alright? Yes? Private?"

She nods and he realises he can just hear her, good.

"Sir! I'll put it in the back. I'll re-seal it. Are you alright sir, you're bleeding a bit"

He puts his hand to his forehead, blood,

"Maybe some debris. It's not deep. Head wounds always bleed don't worry. Stay here and look after the desk until you're relieved. Are you sure you're alright?"

He looks round the tent, a couple of other people look shaken but seem otherwise to be alright. Nothing to be done here, he'll have to check outside. He takes a deep breath. Better not to anticipate the worst.

.....

It is the worst.

.....

In the FBI building in Quantico where Will works as a forensic entomologist he and Jimmy are eating lunch in the canteen. Up on the screen above the counter the TV is as ever turned to a news station. As if the FBI didn't have enough news to be going on with. Will always sits with his back to the counter and the screen otherwise he gets far too drawn in by it.

Will watches Jimmy watching the news. In particular when Jimmy puts down his sandwich and his cup of coffee and gets up from the table and skirts round it to get closer to the counter. There's a news flash just ticker taping across the bottom and then the screen switches to what might be some local footage taken on a mobile phone.

Will turns in his chair to look at Jimmy,

"What's got you Jims?"

"Come here Will. Come here right now"

Will gets up frowning and then stands and looks up at the screen,

"Isn't that where Hannibal is posted"

Will nods, his mouth going dry, his eyes tearing up,

"Fucking hell. It is. Fuck. It is. What the hell happened?"

"Can you turn this up, Abel? Turn it up, the TV for the segment"

On the screen they've switched to someone with a better camera and suddenly it's Hannibal himself on the screen talking to the interviewer. The interviewer has a flack jacket. Hannibal by contrast has just his desert fatigues his name clearly stencilled on his chest.

"We think the device was walked in. Hard to say just yet. Some local casualties which is devastating as we have some excellent relationships here. My interpreter,"

He swallows hard and looks away from the camera for a moment, looks back,

"Looks like he tried to intercept whoever was involved. A brave thing to do. We've some injured. I don't think further fatalities. Everyone responded very quickly and effectively. Very unusual for this to happen."

Behind them off screen there are some shouts and Hannibal smiles at the interviewer,

"Thanks for your help, please reassure folks at home we're alright. I'm going to go and check on a few things."

The camera man pans off after Hannibal who is walking swiftly away towards a small group struggling with someone bloodied on the ground, the camera pans quickly back to the interviewer. Will doesn't really hear the rest.

"He was bleeding. Jimmy. He was bleeding"

"But he is alright Will. You saw. He's alright. You're gonna have to tell Abigail. Someone will say for sure. His name was on the screen. There'll be clips all evening. Especially if anyone American

died. Don't look at me like that, you know it's true. Ok. Come with me now. Come on. You've had a shock."

Back in their own lab Jimmy pushes Will into a chair.

"Stay there. I'm getting Jack's secret stash. Brian? Where the fuck are you? Where's Bev?"

Brian ducks out of the tech room and Bev comes into the room from the morgue they use,

"What? Will? What on earth?"

"Some kind of bomb at Hannibal's base. He's ok. We saw him on TV, but it's bad. Will's a bit upset"

The three of them exchange glances and Jimmy gestures to their boss Jack's office and makes a swigging from a bottle gesture. The other two nod to him, Brian gets one of the emergency blankets and brings it and wraps Will up in it. Bev comes and sits beside him and rubs his hands. He takes the glass from Jimmy and downs it in one go. Hands it back without really looking at it.

"You can now say it. I am royally fucked"

"It's alright Will. We get it. It's not ok, we know that too. Brian, you're the medic, suggestions?"

"Will, in a bit we're going to take you home. Jim will get Abi from school. We're not going to scare her. She's ok. You're ok. Hannibal is ok. Even if he was doing the whole macho thing. And you're going to email his Sergeant. And we're going to make sure you don't say anything stupid ok?"

Will nods, he feels a bit better now.

"Ok, yes. Ok. That's a good idea. They'll know we must have seen it. Can we email now?"

Bev brings over her laptop and the four of them compose a friendly kind and careful email to Hannibal's Sargeant at Arms. Brian is sensible when he says,

"We have to understand he might not be able to reply straight away or even today or tonight. We don't know what else might have been fucked up. Their comms systems. I don't know. Anything really. And if people have been hurt then they'll be the priority."

Will smiles weakly,

"I'm doing better. It really was the shock of it. You know. It just brought back shit. It's ok. I'm ok. Thanks guys. Really."

"And we're still taking you home. And we're still checking the TV so Abigail can see that Hannibal is ok. And later we're going to help her write him a nice card. Alright? And we're getting something awful as take out. Right?"

No one disagrees.

Throughout the evening Bev compulsively checks the email. In the end she gets something very short back,

>Dear Ms Katz, Sergeant Budge was slightly hurt. He's in with the medics and really just slightly. The Colonel is completely fine though he says he's sorry he dropped the envelope and when he

shakes it it makes a tinkly noise which doesn't sound right at all. He says to tell Abigail that he's very pleased with her letter and thank you and to Dr Graham as well. If you have his cell I am going to try and get an international call placed for 7am your time tomorrow? A landline would be ever better but I know how mornings with kids run even if the Colonel doesn't! I was with him when the device went off and he really is alright. Sincerely Private M. Lass First Class<

Will isn't sure whether to laugh or cry or if he'll even manage to sleep. But he realises its more likely that he will than Hannibal will. So he makes the effort for both their sakes.

.....

In the morning Abigail is a little subdued. She does believe Hannibal is alright she'd made Will watch him on TV four times the night before and he told her he'd wake her before the call came this morning. When the phone rings it's her who answers,

"Yes we're alright. Thank you. How are you?"

There's a pause as she listens slightly frowning,

"Did it hurt a lot? We could see the blood on the picture."

She nods to whatever he's saying at the other end, then she smiles,

"No we didn't let Buster or Winston watch. They would be sad you were hurt. Even if we explained. Yes daddy let me see. He thought it was better than just telling me. "

she listens again and then smiles some more,

"We hope so too. And don't worry about the tinkly noise. It's just glass it can have some new stuff instead. Daddy is nodding so it should be fine. He's here now do you want to talk to him? Ok. I love you Hannibal. Say hello to Sargeant Budge please. I hope he is alright too. Bye."

She hands over the phone and Will smiles at her as she snuggles into his lap,

"Hannibal? How are you? Thank you for calling us"

They speak for a few minutes. At the end Will pauses after something Hannibal has said.

"I know, yes. We do too. Yes. I know she did. Yes. You have to know we do, I do. Alright. Be careful. No surprises today maybe?"

He laughs at whatever Hannibal says and closes the line as he puts the phone down on the cradle.

"He's definitely ok. And he's definitely coming to see us just after Christmas"

"Did he say he loved us?"

"You are a nosey little girl"

"I take after you daddy. Everybody says so"

"You take after Buster!"

They both giggle when he tickles her.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 6

"Sit down Will, how are you doing? Bev filled me in. She said she'd tell you too. Did she?"

Will nods. He knows his boss keeps a careful watch on all of them. They're almost never in any danger at all but that doesn't mean the work doesn't get to them occasionally. Even Will knows that the morbidity of his work can get him down, usually by increments rather than in one fell swoop.

"She did, I'm ok. You know we're doing this Adopt a Soldier programme? The base where our guy is posted was hit this week, you'll have seen it on the news"

"I saw it. Hell of a thing. Your guy ok?"

"Yes. Fortunately. Flying debris caught him but that was it. It's a bit of a mess there. They lost an interpreter and a local guy who acted as a runner and guide. They're a bit upset."

"You too?"

"It was the shock. We saw it on the TV in the canteen"

Jack nods, Jimmy has told him how it all went down too. Will is well loved and everyone is a bit careful with him. He's not fragile especially, and he's not broken for sure but Abi's mom dying was a terrible thing. It must have all come flooding back seeing the news like that.

"Yeah? How you doing with that? You can talk to our guy if you like?"

Will pauses and considers, Frederick is ok. And maybe it'd be a good idea. He hasn't really wanted to spill all the beans to everyone. Even if they are tight as a group. Though he's probably blown it to some extent. No one would get as upset over something like this if it was only a pen pal thing. Soldiers get injured a little or a lot all the time.

"Actually, I think that's maybe a good idea. Will you set it up Jack? I am ok. But even better to be sure right?"

Jack is ex services, he knows the drill, prevention is a hell of a lot better than cure,

"You need any time off?"

"Not yet. Though our friend might make it over here after Christmas, if I need a couple of days then I'll put in for some time if it's ok?"

"Let me know when you can. I realise it might be a bit last minute. Bella could tell you about all the times I thought I'd be back only to have me arrive three days early or on one memorable occasion two weeks late."

Will smiles, but really that's part of his anxiousness about it all. The unpredictability. He doesn't do so well with high degrees of uncertainty. Yeah, he definitely should talk with Frederick.

.....

Hannibal pulls Will's letter from a few weeks ago out of his breast pocket. He's read all of Abigail and Will's letters multiple times. This one though he now carries around with him. In some ways the letter that came with the Christmas package is an easier and softer read. But it's this one he returns to.

Dear Hannibal,

You could probably tell how happy you made Abigail. She loved the presents thank you so much. And the Skype call was very special for her. The extra mile? I think you went there. Even with the dramatic ending! And please thank Sargeant Budge for the email. It was very helpful as reassurance. Either for eight your olds or their slightly anxiety prone daddies.

I think I should tell you something about that so you understand. I will be anxious. When people I care about are hurt or ill or in danger I get over anxious. It's a thing. It's not entirely unfounded or I'd be anxious about being anxious. Yeah, that bad.

I told you Abigail's mom died. She did. It was a bit worse than just died. She was killed. We still don't know by who. It might even have been an accident. She went missing for a bit. She had a bit of history of not quite coping and she did that sometimes. Just went away to get herself together. Usually she'd let us know after a day or so. But this time she was gone for three weeks.

I was at work when the news came in that a body had been found in Baltimore. None of us even thought twice about it. I can remember seeing it now, the reporter just running through what she knew. We happened to catch it during a break in the case we were working at the time.

Anyway. Long story short we got called in when the locals couldn't decide if it was part of a bigger case they'd had (it wasn't). And we arrived and suffice to say I only knew her by her wedding ring. It was a difficult time. Abigail wouldn't believe her mom had really died but I couldn't take her to see her. She doesn't really trust things she can't see now.

So, maybe you'll understand it when I say I panic a bit. I know that's not your fault, but if you're around us for longer you'll hit this particular brick wall at some point. Everyone of our friends has so far. The extent to which they decide to scale the wall or just lean up against it varies. Either is ok. Really. You can choose.

I suppose that's partly a warning and an invitation. I like that you're around us. I hope you'll be around us for longer. But I recognise that when you started out you were probably imagining letters and cards and friendly correspondence not a slightly precocious eight year old and her slightly peculiar father. And both of them rather falling for you. I guess you might get that a lot. So we won't take it personally. Just say if you need to ease back or if you need us to.

Abigail knows you're busy and that you can't always write. You've done a brilliant job so far. But please don't put aside anything you need to do. We're not really going anywhere.

If I'm really honest though, I'm a bit anxious about all this. Part of me feels like I ought to back out now before you get hurt or Abigail does. I'm not so good at navigating this stuff. But we're hanging in there at the moment, with you. So, I hope I haven't overstepped by saying even half of this.

Will

Hannibal reads it twice. Really he better take a copy of it before it falls apart along the seams. The cards he'd had couriered afterwards hardly seem to have been enough in response. But given

everything that's happened since he thinks they're probably doing as well as can be expected.

He looks at his watch. He should go. In the run up to the holidays there is always a lot to do. As he's gathering his bags and papers Private Lass comes and stands beside his chair in the mess. She salutes and he looks up at her,

"Private? At ease. How are you? I haven't thanked you properly for holding onto the package for me. Everything alright?"

"Sir, yes sir. About the package? The little girl said it was glass. I'm guessing it's a picture sir. Would you like me to get it replaced before the holidays then you can still open it on Christmas itself and it'd be mint?"

"That's a very kind thought, I think it's a self portrait they've been working on, Abigail and her father. I'd be very glad to have it fixed before I open it. Could you?"

"Yes sir. I think I've found someone local who can do the work. If you bring it by I'll sort it out sir"

He smiles again,

"Thank you Private that'd be very kind"

When he's gone she does a little fist pump, 'yes!'

.....

"Daddy? Is this our Christmas box? Can we open the outer bit?"

Will puts the long flattish box on the table. It's got both US army stamps and a courier flash on it. So it's got here pretty quickly. It's strange somehow to think of Hannibal having packed this only a few days earlier.

"You can undo the outer box and then we can see what's inside? Alright? Presents under the tree though? Yes?"

She nods eagerly though Will is aware she might try and sneak a peak if he's not extra vigilant. And he has to check for food especially chocolate which neither of the dogs should eat but which they will sniff for and dribble over if they catch even a whif.

"Thank you daddy. May I have the scissors please?"

Inside the box there's a small wrapped box for Abigail, something wrapped for both Buster and Winston, three embroidered felt tree decorations in the shape of reindeer, a letter and card each and a wrapped box for Will as well.

Abigail carefully feels her present,

"It's not squashy. And it doesn't smell of anything except paper. What is it daddy?"

Will takes the box from her and carefully shakes it. Maybe a very faint rattle?

"I don't know. Do you want to try with mine? And the boys?"

She tries Winston and Buster but they're both rustly and otherwise impossible to tell. She repeats the same things with Hannibal's present to Will.

"I don't know. How many days do I have to wait?"

"What day is it today?"

"It's Wednesday."

"Good, and what date?"

"The twelfth?"

"Completely, so, how many days left then?"

"It depends on if I can open them on Christmas eve or Christmas day"

"Nice try Abigail Graham. Alright then. Is it possibly time we washed our hands and made something for dinner?"

"Maybe. Aren't you going to open your letter first"

"I think dinner first. And then cards and letters. We can put the cards up and we can put the decorations on the tree. How about that?"

"Ok. What is for dinner?"

"I thought we might have a few shepherds left in the fridge, shall we make a pie with them?"

Abigail rolls her eyes at him, she knows it's not really made from shepherds but her daddy always says it.

"Better than toads in the hole. Yes please"

Will smiles. The old jokes just keep on giving. Usually.

.....

When Will goes to see Frederick Chilton his department's go to therapist he takes all of Hannibal's cards and letters with him. If he's going to talk this through he might as well go all out.

Ninety minutes later he comes about a bit wrung out but mostly quite a lot happier. Frederick has been thoughtful, helpful, challenging and also able to gently poke fun at Will in a way Will could totally understand and respond to.

"Not too broken to think about dating Dr Graham?"

"I dunno Frederick, I'm not sure I'm really thinking about dating the guy. More like he's here one week in twenty six so it's hot sex, three nice dinners, a trip to the zoo and bye bye?"

Frederick laughs,

"Definitely not to broken to think about dating Will"

"Be careful where you put the punctuation Frederick!"

"Will. I know you're deflecting. You know you are. What about it?"

"I'm not too broken to date. And now we'll have to find out if he agrees"

Frederick smiles,

"Good job Will"

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 7

"Daddy? Daddy? Are you awake?"

"Abigail if you can still see the moon in the sky it is too early to get up. And before you say anything the dogs do not need to be let out. I did that half an hour ago."

"Can I stay here then? I'm too excited!"

Will sighs, actually he is too. The last ten days have been a bit of a tizz, first with Christmas itself and then with parties and then with New Year's Eve too. And in theory, today, barring disaster Hannibal will arrive in time for dinner.

In theory. They know he left the base last night as Private Lass emailed to let them know,

>Dear Dr Graham and Abigail, the Colonel asked me to let you know he got off from here on time. His first flight is with a General and they nearly always keep to time! The layover in Germany is four hours. He might manage to get an email to you then or not. Depending on how it is on the ground, so don't wait up for it!

I've checked the weather forecast for there and it's a bit poor which might delay them some. So. Again, don't wait up! There's a possibility they might have to stop in London to pick someone up. If that happens it's an extra two hours but he said he'd definitely email you if that happens. I hope you all have a great holiday. Sincerely Private Miriam Lass First Class<

When Will read it out to Abigail she'd looked worried,

"If they're late will he still have to leave in three days?"

"He will sweetheart. He has to be back otherwise he'll be awol"

"He'll be an owl? That's silly!"

Will laughed at her,

"Not an owl, AWOL, it stands for 'Absent Without Leave', if you don't have permission."

"So Buster goes AWOL all the time"

"Perfect example, you can tell Hannibal he is very like Buster. I am sure he would be delighted by that comparison"

He knows that if she snuggles in beside him she will, probably, go back to sleep so he shifts over to give her more room. They've fixed up her room so that tonight Hannibal can sleep in it. Will is making no assumptions. Well, that's probably not quite true but he's being a bit careful to try and keep a lid on them.

"Shall I tell you a story daddy?"

"To help me go to sleep? Sure thing. Go for it"

She's asleep before he is, but not by much.

.....

On the approach to Frankfurt airport Hannibal stretches, God this is uncomfortable even if the uniform has got him an upgrade. It's a civilian flight and the General half asleep beside him probably didn't hurt with the whole move up a class. He makes it a thing never to ask. And sometimes he's upgraded and sometimes he's not.

He pulls out his cell phone, he usually has very little use for it but on Christmas Day he took pictures of the present from Will and Abigail. Partly to remind himself and partly because if everything works to plan he will spend three to four hours in Frankfurt airport with his sister. Not the most beautiful of locations but enough. He last saw her on the two week R and R he got as part of his long posting overseas.

"Colonel? You awake? You want to see if you can rustle me up some coffee?"

Hannibal smiles at the General beside him,

"Of course Sir. I'll see what I can do. You want anything to eat? We've got about twenty minutes before they shut it all down"

"Pretzel or bagel or something. Bready. You know?"

Hannibal smiles and unfolds himself from the seat, he looks back to the stewards' area and sure enough there is coffee being made. He brings back two cups and muffins and a bag of pretzels. The General laughs,

"Good enough. Thanks. You on the full RnR?"

"No Sir, stopping here for an hour or two to see my sister then a quick visit home to see some friends."

"72 hours? If there aren't delays? Must be good friends!"

Hannibal smiles, 'don't ask, don't tell' may be dead in the water but not so easy for a Colonel or higher if he had the ambition.

"Adopt a Soldier scheme. Little girl who no one picked so I wrote to her. She's a sweetheart. Single parent, I've a photo of a drawing they did of themselves. Would you like to see?"

The General nods and takes the phone when Hannibal opens the image,

"Oh that's very good. Is the dad an artist or something? It's good. Does it look like them?"

"The little girl for sure, I've seen her by Skype and a few photos. I've never seen her father so it's hard to tell"

The General appraises him carefully,

"What does he do? The dad?"

"Forensic entomologist. FBI"

The General nods,

"How long you got left on this tour?"

"Enough. We've had some stress, but it's going well. For the most part. But you'll have seen the reports"

"I have. You thinking about coming back?"

"Getting out? No."

He pauses,

"I haven't been"

The General smiles at him a little,

"It is changing. You could be the poster boy for that you know. Might get you a promotion? Might get you stateside?"

Hannibal looks at him with some surprise,

"That might be a little anticipatory Sir"

The General laughs a little,

"I'll ask you again in 72 hours. Seriously, I mean it. You've had good reviews. We might be able to do something. Not next week, of course. But maybe? Keep me in the loop. Alright? I'll be honest with you. Supporting you, supporting inclusivity? Might do me some good too. I'm seen as a bit old fashioned. A bit old school. My wife is always telling me to bit a bit more proactive. Ok then?"

Hannibal smiles, 72 hours? It's not long. Not nearly long enough.

.....

"Mischa! Thank you for waiting. What a hellish thing"

"No one's fault really. How long did you circle?"

"An extra hour and I'd already had every conversation possible with the General on the flight with me!"

"Yes! Are you going to tell me about it? How long have you got now?"

"Two hours, just under. If we get out on time. I am sorry. How was the drive?"

"Appalling. But I am very glad to see you Hannibal. You look alright. Though that thing in November was terrible. How are your people?"

"Get me some coffee first and something to eat. I've eaten muffins and pretzels this morning and nothing else!"

When they're seated and he's got coffee and some further bready things his sister gives him a once over.

"Alright, tell me about the girl and her father. You're excited. I can tell."

He smiles and hands over his cell phone, she scrolls through the pictures he's taken of Abigail's and Will's drawings. She smiles a little.

"Ok good. Is that what he looks like?"

"I don't know. We've barely spoken let alone seen each other. Though they did get the full unexpurgated Colonel Lecter show on every international news channel for twenty four hours."

"I saw it too. You looked very commanding, is it a uniform thing for him do you think?"

"That is also something we have not discussed."

"You better. I don't want a repeat of Matthew."

She pauses for a moment,

"Or Anthony"

He looks at her a little sardonically,

"How convenient you and Will live on different continents."

"Matthew is back stateside though. Did you know? Mother told me"

"I didn't know she kept in touch."

"Army wives. It's his mother not him"

Hannibal nods.

"Did she say where?"

"Washington or the Pentagon. One of those. Or both. Anthony though? You'll be glad to know I have no idea"

"He was worse to you than to me"

"He was worse to his wife"

They both nod in silent agreement. Certainly so.

.....

When Abigail eventually wakes up she is nose to nose with Buster who has crawled into the well of heat left by Will when he went to let Winston out and to check the email. Abi crawls out of bed and shuffles to the top of the stairs,

"Daddy? Are you awake? Is it early still?"

"Downstairs Abs. Come and have some breakfast. I can fill you in."

She hurries down but is careful not to slip. People fall down stairs all the time so she's careful.

"Did Hannibal email?"

"He did. From Germany. Do you remember where that is? And from London, which is capital of where?"

She frowns, he asks difficult questions in the morning but she knows these,

"Germany is in Europe. And London is in England which is a big island with three countries in it. That's right isn't it?"

"Spot on. So. Hannibal got delayed in Frankfurt, that's Germany. And before you ask yes and no like the frankfurters. There was a lot of ice so he had to wait there for a few hours. But the good thing is that he saw his sister there so they actually got more time together"

Abigail isn't quite sure about this. It's nice that he had more time with his sister but that means less time with them? She tries not to pout.

"And what about London. Did they have to stop there after all?"

"They did. It means they are currently running, well, lets work it out, three extra hours in Germany, plus two originally planned in London plus an extra two because that ran late as well. What's that?"

She breathes,

"Seven hours late. That means his journey will be..."

She does the mathematics in her head,

"Oh daddy! His journey will be 32 hours long! He'll be too tired to talk to us when he arrives!"

"If he's lucky he'll get some sleep on the way. But it means he won't arrive until long last dinner time. So what shall we do? Shall we eat breakfast and then decide?"

She considers this, they'd been due to collect Hannibal from the airport at 6pm. Now he won't arrive until 1am tomorrow. She has almost never stayed up that late before.

"I think we had better have lots of breakfast. And then try and sleep all day so we can stay up late?"

Will smiles, it will take a harder heart than he has to deny her the chance to meet Hannibal off the flight. Though they'll all be somewhat the worse for wear. Breakfast it is. He gives Hannibal a thought, he'd slightly fudged it with Abigail, the flight from London hasn't actually left yet. Definitely the worse for wear. Hannibal had sounded beyond frustrated and resigned in the second email.

Dear Will, this will be quick. Although the flights are slow. And so is whoever we are waiting for. It it turns out to be some celebrity there may be a mutiny on the flight. If it's a politician I can guarantee a full scale revolution. Don't watch the news, the plane with the pirate flag is ours. We'll be in at one. If you'd rather I got a taxi or found a hotel close to the airport tonight I wouldn't blame you for it! Alright, we're being called again. Probably to be told we're delayed further. Until later, I'll save the rest for then,
Hannibal.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 8

"You're being suspiciously calm"

Will smiles down at his bowl of soup, Bev's girlfriend Molly is nice, quite fluffy and rounded and cute, fluffier than he'd expected really of Bev. When they'd got together Will had quizzed her about it,

"Really? She's all soft bangs, and sweetness, and kinda cuddly?"

Bev had waggled her eyebrows at him,

"Hell yeah cuddly. Omg so cuddly. She's gorgeous. And really we have shit to face at work I don't want to come home to Ms Spiky Bitch Shoes I want cuddly. I want sweet. I want make me scream in a good way. TMI Will? I can give you more babe"

He'd held up his hands in mock surrender.

"Are you the poster girl for sane Bev?"

She'd smirked at him, maybe huffed a little,

"Someone in this team has to be. I love Margot, you know that Will, but cuddly she is not."

"Cuddly enough"

"Well good for you both then. All of us in fact. Yay for cuddles"

They'd high fived. It had been the year before Will's wife had died. Since then he'd dated precisely zero people. Molly eyes him,

"Come on. Too calm, have you taken something?"

He makes a face,

"Would you blame me if I had? No, don't look like that I haven't, I wouldn't have driven here if I had. No. I'm simply channeling all my anxiety and nerves through Abigail. She's been sick once this morning already. I'm hoping it's just excitement. If she's ill over the next few days we will have hysterics and wailing"

"And that'd be you and not Abigail I'm guessing?"

Will grins at her and does the got it in one shoot a finger gesture, they both laugh and he takes a deeper breath and lets it go.

"Yeah. Me. I am actually stupidly nervous. I mean. He'll be here for two and a half days. He tried to get extra time but there's some conference he had to go to. It's not exactly much is it? I can't blow it that badly can I?"

There's a pause and then they both laugh, a lot. Bev comes into the kitchen with Lily and Abigail,

"Ok way too much laughter in here. Who said there was lunch? Abigail is gonna eat it and not throw it up all over Hello Kitty, right Abs?"

Abigail smiles a little wanly, Lily has leant her a tee shirt with the ubiquitous cat, loathed and loved by many in seemingly equal measure. Her own tee shirt and skirt have already gone into a washing machine.

"I'm alright. Sorry daddy. Why are you and Molly laughing so much? Was it a joke, can you tell me?"

Will smiles a little and then has to not laugh out loud all over again, how can you explain an inadvertent pun about blow jobs to an eight year old and her evil adult friend. Bev is already giving him you know I'm gonna ask later looks. Molly smiles a little too but does nothing to save him from this train wreck of a moment.

"I said something very funny but is only funny for a hot second and then it's gone. Have you had that happen Abs? At school when someone told a joke really quietly and then Miss Bloom asks them to repeat it and they go all hot and embarrassed and they say it again and it's not funny but it was definitely funny five minutes ago"

Lily and Abigail nod wisely, this happens much too often. Bev gives him a look,

"Nice deflection daddy, you know I'm gonna ask later, right?"

"And I'll tell you later, right!"

.....

The steward lays a hand on the soldier's arm, honestly? They've all tried flirting with him over the flight. He might be tired but he is still drop dead gorgeous and he's been polite and a little friendly but nothing more. Even Roman who can generally flirt with anything had been closed down pretty fast,

"Nothing. Damn! Am I losing it? I'm not losing it? Am I? I dropped so many hints he could open a sports book. Not a damn thing. He just smiled and said I was very courteous to go to all that trouble. I'm not courteous, I'm thirsty! Damn."

Now though Georgia has kind of got it,

"Sir? Colonel Lecter isn't it? I'm sorry to disturb you sir"

Hannibal stretches a little and opens his eyes properly"

"How far now?"

"Another ninety minutes. We'll wake the cabin properly in a minute and then it will be busy all the way in. We're about forty minutes behind schedule. Bad head wind."

He takes a breath, another forty minutes, which means an hour. Damn. He'll sleep all the way through at least the first day. Oh dear.

"Sir?"

"I'm so sorry. Was there something else?"

"We got a message in the cabin. Your husband says to say your little girl has thrown up twice today but they'll be at the airport for sure and if they're not there she might have been sick again but please wait. And he says something about you being like Buster?"

"One of the dogs. Always MIA. The black sheep of the family. Well, one of them. Thank you. Poor baby, fancy being sick."

"I'm sorry sir. Is she ok? I mean, is it the flu or something?"

"Probably excitement."

"Oh. It must be so hard, I am sorry. When did you last see her?"

Hannibal considers, poster boy indeed,

"Skype call on her birthday in November though she's seen me on the news since."

"Well, I hope you have a lovely visit. And that you don't end up in the dog house either!"

He laughs a little,

"Very good. I'll use that later. Thank you for telling me. I'll try and catch another ten minutes"

She smiles and gets up to go back to the stewards area where Roman sticks his tongue out at her.

"Why are the good ones always taken? A Colonel! Damn. Do you think he likes to be called daddy?"

"Possibly only by his little girl"

"Oh very good. You're very funny today. Come on. Three hundred grumpy people in coach to coax into a semblance of humanity."

.....

Will leans back in a moulded plastic seat in the airport arrivals waiting area, Abigail is sprawled on him mostly asleep. She's been sick a grand total of four times today and Will is beginning to pray she really hasn't come down with something. He glances up at the board again.

Still not on the ground. But as he looks it clicks over. Damn if he doesn't feel terrified. Really arrived. And oh look it's only 2am. They won't be home until 4 and that's if Hannibal hussles through security and luggage reclaim. Do soldiers get priority? Probably not on a civilian flight. But maybe? He gently shakes Abigail,

"Daddy, I'm so tired. Can we go home soon?"

"I know sweetie, Hannibal's plane just landed, are you ok to wait just a little bit longer?"

He smooths her hair back from her face. She'd started the day in her best tee shirt and skirt and shoes. Then she'd borrowed Lily's hello kitty shirt, then a different one and now she is wearing a

Japanese Fox kigurami with the hood pulled up. She looks beyond sweet and is also a hot, heavy and miserable lump.

"I'm alright. Will he come soon?"

Will smiles,

"We'll find out won't we?"

Abigail wakes up just enough to hold onto her father's neck as he stands up and she wraps her legs around her waist. Will bops her on the nose with his own and she laughs and pokes him and then does an almighty yawn that consumes half her face.

And that's how Hannibal first sees them, Abigail yawning as widely as anyone up way past their bedtime. Will smiling at her and saying something which makes her laugh and pop him on the nose.

"Will"

"Hey. Hey, Abigail! Hannibal's here"

She squiggles round in her father's arms and holds her own out so Hannibal can take her. She clings to him and burrows into his neck.

"Oh good. I love you Hannibal. Daddy can we go home now please?"

She's asleep within minutes, Hannibal smiles at Will,

"Just like that? I envy her!"

Will looks at him consideringly,

"I think I do too"

Hannibal smiles back and frees up an arm and draws Will in too. They simply stand there for a few moments close and warm. Will pulls back a little,

"Home?"

"Please"

.....

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 9

Hannibal carefully inserts Abigail into the car with the low booster seat. He does up her seatbelt and eventually manages to disentangle himself. Will smiles at him,

"She's an octopus disguised as a fox. I've put your duffel in the trunk. Ok?"

Hannibal straightens up and cricks his back a little,

"I sincerely hope your seats recline. I shall endeavour not to sleep all the way."

"Sleep if you want. We'll try and keep Abigail asleep when we get back, if she wakes she'll be cranky and then won't go back to sleep and I should say now her other onesie is Godzilla for a reason!"

"So, a lizard, a cephalopod and a fox? Does she take after you in any of these?"

Will smiles and takes a step closer to him beside the passenger door,

"You could find out?"

Perhaps it's not so surprising that Hannibal crowds him against the car and has Will's face in his hands and is kissing him like there is no tomorrow within seconds. Will pushes back against him and when Hannibal pushes a thigh between Will's legs and grinds him up against the car he makes a small desperate noise. They break apart slowly,

"That may have been somewhat impulsive"

"Good! I like impulsive. I'm not sure though I really want to say the first time we kissed was in bay six of car park five."

"Ahh, yes. Too late I'm afraid. And I'm not sure I especially want to explain to my dry cleaner why I came in my dress pants like an excited teenager at prom"

"That good? Or that long?"

"Both"

Will smiles and they laugh a little. Hannibal carefully kisses Will again and then presses their foreheads together.

"You said something about home?"

"Sure. I did. About two hours if the traffic and weather don't conspire against us. Maybe 4:30 if we're lucky"

"And if we're not?"

"I have emergency gear in the back if we're marooned and the four horseman of the apocalypse show up and call dibs on the continental US"

"The voice of experience"

"I'd say you have no idea but I think I'd be wrong"

.....

In the car Hannibal tries very hard not to sleep. But the rocking motion and the sound of tyres on concrete and tarmac do for him and he's sound asleep only ten minutes into the drive. Will faintly wonders if he will be as bad as Abigail when they arrive and he has to wake him.

He thinks a lot about the kiss. A good kiss. Perhaps not legendary because of the environment and the context but good. Will would go as far as to say promising. And reassuring. They haven't discussed anything really. How much of this is romance, or friendship, or family, how much is longing, how much is lust? And none of these things are mutually exclusive. Will hopes it is everything at once. But they have exactly, he looks at the clock, 60 hours before they have to be back here saying goodbye.

If it all goes badly 60 hours is a long time. If it goes well 60 hours is no time at all. They'll be asleep for at least 21 hours of it. Will does the mathematics, maybe slightly less but the rest of tonight, such as it is, and tomorrow night which is really today and one more night after that. Shit. Two actual nights, whatever they can salvage of today and then one full day. And Hannibal's been travelling for 32 hours already, no, 35 hours now.

Will glances up in the rear view mirror. Abigail is also asleep. And shall hopefully stay that way.

.....

When Hannibal opens his eyes there is a small dragon sitting on the end of his bed looking at him hard,

"Abigail? What time is it? I'm assuming this is your room. Did I steal your bed?"

"It's alright we'd made it up ready for you. We thought you'd need a nice room with lots of space. I'm sleeping in the trundle in daddy's room. He's still asleep. I think we must have been very late. I don't remember. I've been awake for hours. I fed the dogs and let them out and back in"

She smiles broadly, clearly very pleased with herself.

"I can make you breakfast, though really it's almost too late for lunch. It's almost 2pm. That's in the afternoon. It means post something."

"Meridian"

"That's right. I can't make coffee because the machine is too hard but I can put the kettle on and I can bring you some juice. Would you like that?"

"Yes please, show me where the bathroom is and I'll be with you in a few minutes"

"You haven't got your pyjama top on. That's an undershirt. My daddy wears them to bed but they're not real pyjamas. You must have been very tired. Shall I turn around?"

"I think young lady before I get out of bed you should go and make me some toast. I'll be there in a moment"

She giggles and pulls the door closed and then opens it again,

"I've shut it now"

She does so and he smiles a little.

It takes him fifteen minutes to upend his duffel, find some civvies and his wash kit and then the bathroom and a hot shower. He must have slept for somewhere around eight or nine hours. Depending on when they got in.

He joins Abigail in the kitchen and manages to make the coffee maker work. It begins a steady drip drip. She comes and climbs onto his lap with her file of drawings and begins to explain about the stickers on the outside as well as the pictures inside.

"Does this mean you are Godzilla or Godzuky?"

"Daddy says Godzuky isn't really real"

"But Godzilla is?"

She frowns a bit, worrying about the strange conspiracies of grown ups.

"I'm pretty sure. I've seen pictures. Have you seen pictures"

"I have. And he'd be pleased to have you in the family I think. Have you checked on your daddy recently"

"Not for a bit. Do you want to? I can make him some more juice. His room is opposite the bathroom. It's not as nice as mine, but don't say that to him. He does try."

In the bedroom Abigail has made her own bed and Will is still asleep on his. And wearing the undershirt plus some boxer shorts as she'd suggested. Hannibal watches him for a few moments with a mixture of pleasure and something hot and urgent. It's sharply accented when Will stirs against the sheets and makes the same small noise as the previous night.

Carefully Hannibal sits beside him on the edge of the bed and strokes his head, Will arching into the touch like a cat.

"Abs? You better have brought water or something. Still too soon"

"I've brought nothing I'm afraid though Abigail is making toast"

Will sits up sharply,

"Shit! What the hell time is it. Damn. I'm so sorry. That was a surprise"

"I hope a good one"

"Well. Yes. What time is it?"

"Almost 2:30 post meridian"

"Abigail told you that? She's doing good. God. I am sorry"

"Don't be. I woke about half an hour ago. Though I had the pleasure of a dragon, sorry, a Godzilla. I have almost zero recollection of this morning. I'm sorry. That's so rude of me"

"Worried you kissed and ran?"

"Worried that we shocked Hello Kitty"

"God she's terrible. Lily brought the poster back from Korea. She says it's the largest poster you can get. I believe her. Don't worry, her virtue is pretty intact. If you move I'll get up and we can actually do something with the day"

Hannibal realises he has leant down over Will one hand either side of Will's head on the pillow, he eases back upright.

"I'm going to have to pay better attention."

Will snorts a little,

"You did alright. I'll tell you later on. For now I need a gallon of coffee"

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 10

Chapter Summary

Latter part of chapter

NSFW

what can I say, Hannibal is stateside for 69 hours and they spent nine of that fast asleep!

Next chapter - latter part nsfw.

Bev puts her arm round Will as the two of them watch the small group outside trying to get the barbecue to light.

“I like him. I wasn’t sure about the whole soldier thing. You know? Dad, Mom, the whole war thing.”

“Korea? Sorry. Stupid of me. Yeah. I wasn’t sure either but I think it’s obvious I’ve changed my mind”

“And then some. So. Last night then? Ok?”

“Beverly, my lovely friend, his flight was delayed by seven hours, we arrived home just after 4:30am. It took an hour to get Abigail to bed by which point Hannibal was practically death standing. And I think I was only marginally better. All three of us slept the sleep of the dead until sometime after 2pm. He’d been travelling for a stupid amount of time. And goes back in two days.”

“Shit. So not much of the good stuff then?”

“Enough to know the good stuff will be excellent stuff”

“Yeah? I want some of the detail. Even I can see he’s got a nice mouth and nice hands”

“He does. He knows how to use both. There was a lot of excellent kissing and a fair amount of very enjoyable touching”

“Shit. Not my thing, but that sounds pretty hot”

“Incandescent. If he smoulders at me one more time I’m going to spontaneously combust.”

“Yeah?”

“For sure. Which I have to say is what I’d wish your barbecue would do. Are we eating this evening or what?”

“I’ll get Moll some lighter fluid in a bit, it’s fun watching preller square up to Hannibal, don’t you think?”

“He’s holding back on the whole alpha male thing”

“You sure about that?”

“Very sure”

“Fuck Will”

“Bev, and this is between us only yes?”

She nods,

“He better”

She laughs, and squeezes him, he makes a cheerful noise which is pitched to some level Hannibal is now attuned to as he turns his head and regards them both. Bev gives him a little wave and squeezes Will again,

“Do you think he might be at all possessive?”

“See answer above Bev”

She laughs, and then pauses,

“You know we could have Abi for a sleepover tomorrow night. If you’d like. You’d have most of the final day all three of you. She possibly wouldn’t even realise.”

“Beverly, hello kitty would be shocked.”

“But you’d like that?”

He looks back at her, and nods slowly,

“I would. Thank you. I’ll see if I can wiggle it past Abigail and I’ll see what Hannibal says.”

“You’re going to ask him?”

“I’m going to see if I can make him think it’s his idea!”

…….

“You are a little heavier than Abigail.”

“I can move if you’re uncomfortable.”

“I would be more uncomfortable if you moved. You’re a little bigger than her as well. Are you comfortable?”

“You’ve a good lap”

Hannibal smiles against the warmth of Will’s blue shirt. Will is kneeling astride his lap rather than actually sitting in it, facing Hannibal. His heart is just under Hannibal’s ear and he can hear it beating perhaps slightly faster than a normal resting pace.

“I’d like to kiss you again if that’s alright”

Will dips his head a little and rubs his nose gently against the side of Hannibal’s face. He eases his mouth round to an angle to slide against and along Hannibal’s. Hannibal gently pushes his tongue against the closed seam of Will’s mouth and runs his hands down Will’s back resting them just above Will’s waist. Will moves into the touch. He rests his hands along Hannibal’s shoulders, just at the junction with his neck.

Slowly Hannibal pulls the back of Will’s shirt out from his jeans and slides his hands underneath it. Will kisses him slightly harder and deeper. Both of them letting their tongues speak an emerging language.

Hannibal moves one hand slowly round to Will’s chest and runs his fingers up and down. Will arches into him as Hannibal carefully circles and then rubs at one of his nipples. He moves his hand practically spanning the space between Will’s nipples with the breadth of it. He flicks gently at the other one, already hardening from the overall stimulation. Will makes a small noise again and rubs himself against Hannibal’s hand, rolling his hips forward as he does so, Hannibal pulls back from the kiss as Will continues to kiss his face and eyelids and cheeks,

“What can I give you Will?”

“Everything. I want everything”

“Good. You shall have it.”

He pulls back a little more,

“Tell me how that works with hello kitty?”

“My eight year old Godzilla asleep in the next room?”

Hannibal runs his hand over Will’s chest again and then brings both hands round so he can undo the top button there. He kisses Will’s throat,

“Yes. With Godzilla. It would be different if me being here was an everyday occurrence, we’d have worked it out.”

“How to have mind blowing sex without waking the entire neighbourhood?”

“Don’t tempt me but yes”

“Mind blowing sex that wakes all the neighbours sounds good.”

“As long as it doesn’t wake Abigail?”

“Something like that. But you do want sex?”

“If that’s something you’d enjoy”

“Do you seriously have any doubts about that? No, you’re right. It’s good to ask. I do want that. I want this. I want you. Very badly”

“And your concerns from before?”

“I still have no idea how this can work in the long run. But I’ve been doing pretty badly up until a few months ago so I should be willing to try. And frankly Abs would kill me if I didn’t. For both our sakes, yours and mine. Not just hers”

“So, we shall send each other erotic letters and tempting drawings and work our way forwards?”

“God. You make that sound extraordinary”

“I think it could be. How’s your erotica?”

“I have absolutely no idea. I could practice. I can draw for sure. Oh. Oh, would you like that? I can draw pretty well anything. If there’s something you like. I can draw that, us.”

“And now I am ridiculously aroused again. What would you draw me?”

Will looks at him and runs a hand over Hannibal’s face and then his own.

“I’ll offer and idea and then you?”

Hannibal smiles at him, kisses him very lightly,

“Please”

“Maybe a picture first of all, just black ink on white stock, maybe a little red, of me on my knees with your cock in my mouth”

Hannibal inhales sharply,

“You went straight for the jugular! I hadn’t expected how effective that would be. Give me a moment”

Will looks at him with some amusement, maybe this could work?

“You know what ever you send to me I will think about constantly until it can be a reality between us?”

Will nods at him,

“Yes. That’s kind if the point isn’t it. Me, on my knees, between your legs. With my hands on the back of your thighs, I think you’re still wearing your pants, your hands in my hair, holding me in place, as a I suck you in? Maybe I’d do a series of quick studies? With your hands at my throat feeling yourself in me as I swallow round you? Or me looking up at you from under my eyelashes maybe with a tiny bit of colour in my cheeks, some spittle as I make you wet, as you leak a little. Like that?”

Hannibal looks up at him and can't find the right words, he just nods slightly, Will leans down and kisses him on the side of his mouth,

"Your turn, something you'd like me to draw"

Hannibal pauses before he whispers,

"The place where we are joined when I enter you"

"Fuck! God. That. Yes, please. Oh god. That would be perfect. A little oily or wet from the lubrication? Maybe your hand or mine guiding you in? Like that? Face to face? Or you fucking me from behind?"

"Will"

"Hannibal?"

"You have to know I want that now. With you. Here. Before I go. How can we make that happen?"

"Beverly said she'd take Abigail tomorrow night?"

"For a sleepover? Would Abigail agree?"

"If necessary, and I'm not proud of this, we will carry her there after she's asleep. It's happened before. She goes to sleep here and wakes up there or vice versa usually for work or childcare reasons"

"Please do not consider anything that might distress her"

"I wouldn't. And we'll have all of the rest of the next day until we take you to the airport as well. And we've tomorrow.

"And for tonight?"

"I could stand some more kissing and some more art commissions? You?"

"The same, though I would like to change my pants. I may lose circulation"

Will slides off his lap and they both sway together for a few minutes,

"Doesn't seem to have affected your circulation too badly"

"Will my darling, you are sadly underestimating me"

"Seriously? I'll need to take measurements to get the proportions right"

"Are you sure it is not you who takes after Buster?"

"What?"

"Incorrigible and unpunishable"

"I give you permission to try"

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 11

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abigail do you think you'd like this book or this one”

Abigail looks assessingly at Hannibal,

“If I was daddy I might say ‘both’?”

“I see? He is like Buster isn't he”

Abigail nods, it is nice to be understood properly by an adult especially one she likes as much as Hannibal. She stretches her hands out to him,

“Up?”

She nods keenly and he stoops and lifts her,

“Better?”

“I can't see from there”

“What are you trying to see?”

“Just around.”

“I'm not sure there is much to see”

He looks around,

“But I appreciate you want to check for yourself. What do you think?”

He swivels her around with her still holding on tight round his neck with her arms and with her legs round his waist.

“Your daddy says you’re an octopus. What do you think?”

“I think he's silly, octpus have eight legs, I've got four!”

“Well, two and two”

“Four”

“I bow to your superior understanding”

“I think you should”

“I am.”

She pushes his nose with hers and he recognises it as the gesture she made to her father when he first saw them at the airport.

“In New Zealand rubbing noses is a kind of kiss. Between some people. Other places too”

“That's good. Lips can be all wet sometimes.”

“So can noses”

She frowns a bit, and reluctantly nods,

“That's true. I hadn't thought of that. Your nose is dry”

She stroke it again and he pretends to eat her fingers. She laughs and pushes his face aside.

“Hannibal Lecter! What a surprise, I thought you were on tour somewhere? That's what your mother said!”

“Iris, hello. I'm here briefly. Abigail this is my friend Iris Brown, she knows mine and Mischa’s mother as well. Iris this is Abigail Graham also a friend of mine”

“She's a darling. Aren't you sweetie”

Abigail goes a little shy when Iris reaches out a finger and strokes her arm. Iris smiles,

“What a pretty child. And who’s is she Hannibal?”

“Hannibal is my Soldier. I adopted him. Miss Bloom asked me to”

Iris looks at him enquiringly,

“The Adopt a Soldier scheme, we met through that. And I am very lucky to have such a good adopter”

Abigail bops him again and then smiles at Iris.

“Are you buying books?”

“Not really sweetheart, I'm waiting for someone”

She looks back at Hannibal,

“Did you know Matthew was back?”

“Mischa told me”

“Oh. Did she? I suppose she thought you'd be interested?”

“It came up in conversation Iris because I was coming here. Mother mentioned it to Mischa. I'm sorry. It's nothing more than that.”

“Shame. I like you, and you were so good for him!”

“And you've known me a long time. Abigail, Iris has known me since I was just a bit older than you”

“Really? But that was a long time ago”

She looks at Iris,

“I think he's fibbing because you look the same age”

“Oh you are a darling. Hannibal if you'd rather not see Matthew I'd understand he’ll be here in about ten minutes or so”

“Iris, you misunderstand. I am not concerned. Matthew made his own choices. I made mine. I'm content. “

“Well, that's nice of you to say so. When are you going back?”

“Tomorrow evening. I've a conference in Germany for two nights and then onwards”

“Oh. Not this thing about deployment”

He looks at her in some surprise, it's not a secret but it's also not something that would be widely known,

“Don't look so worried, I only know because Matthew is going too. Oh. You won't be on the same flight will you?”

“I have no idea. I suppose it is possible. But I wouldn't have thought likely”

Abigail shifts, this is beginning to be boring for her,

“Iris, excuse me we should find Abigail's father and eat some lunch. Abi becomes Godzilla when she is hungry”

“Or tired!”

“Indeed. Or tired”

“You are such a cutie. Is your mummy here too did you get your curls from her”

Abigail regards her more solemnly,

“My hair is my own. I grew it all myself. And my mummy isn't here anymore. She had to go away”

Iris glances at Hannibal,

“Did she? Well I'm sure she was sorry to go. Sometimes adults do very odd things. And yes, I can see now, there's no join, all the curls are definitely yours!”

Abigail smiles again,

“I didn't steal them. I promise”

“Clever girl. Ah. We’ll manage the introductions then. Matthew, darling. Abigail this is my little boy although he's all grown up too”

“Hello Abigail. And hello Hannibal, it's been a while”

“Matthew, how are you? Iris was saying you're back here now. How's that?”

“The Whitehouse? Liaison? It's good. Very tidy. Very. What's the word? Efficient. It's entertaining. What about you Hannibal? Who’s this?”

He nods at Abigail and before Hannibal can respond Iris interjects,

“Adopt a Soldier, isn't she the sweetest. Right Abigail you're going to help me find your parents. Come with me? Yes?”

Abigail looks at Hannibal who nods and smiles at her and Iris takes her hand when she's set down on the floor,

“Will you come and find us soon Hannibal?”

“Of course I shall”

He smiles as she goes with Iris and Hannibal wonders quite how to extract himself from this without a major scene, Matthew reaches out and grabs his forearm,

“Who the fuck is mother kidding! Who the hell is the girl? Are you seeing some woman?”

He says it bitterly and with a degree of malice, Hannibal waits to see if there's any more, Matthew just glares at him,

“She really is part of the Adopt a Soldier programme. And she really did adopt me. And you may have scared her. I'm glad you're doing well Matthew. Excuse me”

Matthew moves to block his path,

“I want to talk to you Hannibal. How long are you here for?”

“Matthew there really isn't anything to say. And I'm leaving tomorrow”

“That leaves today and tomorrow. What do you mean?”

“I'm already committed Matthew. I have plans with Abigail and her family.”

“I see. I could still make things very difficult for you Hannibal.”

Hannibal looks at him, his patience starting to wear thin,

“I'm sure you could”

Matthew looks at him in annoyance, Iris appears at his shoulder,

“Matthew you promised me lunch and not some drama. Hannibal? Abigail is now very like Godzilla and very hungry, she's at the cash desk? Could you join her? Matthew don't be difficult please”

He looks at his mother and makes a small face,

“Alright then. Hannibal. I think you know this isn't over. Not until I say it is.”

He lets himself be drawn away and Hannibal takes some steadying breaths. He starts slightly when Will lays a hand on his arm,

“Sorry. Are you alright? You look a bit shaken?”

“Only something that I thought buried attempting to be Lazarus.”

“Tell me about it later?”

“Yes of course. Nothing for you to worry about.”

“If it worries you, it worries me. I told you that. Alright?”

Hannibal looks down at Abigail standing between them looking up at them, he smiles at her,

“Oh my. Who are you and what have you done with Abigail Graham? Have you eaten her?”

“I'm not even wearing my onesie”

Hannibal makes like he is very shocked,

“My goodness! It talks”

“Daddy, can we go and eat lunch? I think Hannibal might need to eat something he's being very strange. Oh but he needs to buy the books first”

“Hannibal looks at her,

“Oh very nicely done Miss Graham!”

Will frowns at him slightly, but lets his face clear and gently squeezes Hannibal's hand.

“Come on then. We're keeping an eye on you. Can't have you getting into trouble. Abigail, I think Hannibal might be related to Buster too. What do you think?”

“As long as I don't end up in the dog house”

Abigail laughs,

“That's very good! Did you make it up?”

“No, a nice lady on the airplane told me it, after your daddy’s message about being like Buster. It's a recurring theme”

“I don't know what that is”

“It means it keeps coming back”

“Like Buster after he's been naughty?”

Will has to bite his lip not to laugh. She is a clever girl. But what was the thing was the guy. More to the point who on earth was he?

……

Late in the evening after Abigail has been willingly dispatched to Beverly, Will is clearing up whilst Hannibal goes through his cd collection. He finds something and smiles and puts it on the CD player in the living room.

“Stop what you're doing and come and dance with me.”

“To this?”

“Yes, to this. Don't tell me you don't dance? I want pictures of us dancing”

“Is this a James Bond theme?”

“Something like it, Will?”

“Alright, god. I haven't done this for ages.”

“Relax a bit more. Really you only have to shuffle a bit”

“And be pliant in your arms?”

“That's right. How's that?”

Will sighs, there's something quietly thrilling about being held so closely by someone just a little broader, and taller, and just, more. Even better when he kisses you. And kisses you. Even though Will knows he'll have to ask about the guy from earlier. But not this moment. God not this moment.

…….

Chapter End Notes

Quick query... more or less sex? I lost two subscribers today after the first bit of nsfw so I'm just feeling slightly anxious about alienating readers...

And the music? What sound like a James Bond theme but isn't?

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 12

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who's commented. How lovely you are. I am moved by it.

And Hannibal and Will sat so patiently on the sofa whilst I got my act together. If Bev had been there I think she'd have thrown tea bags at me.

Instead I had you. Flower crowns and ravenstags to you. Onwards. I have writing time today and tomorrow. Today several usual length chapters. Tomorrow probably one longer one as I shall be at a comic con and may only get to upload it at the end of the afternoon. And I'm supposed to be writing something on Roman crematoria for next week so I better think about that a bit.

Thank you. You feel like the taste of salt caramel crime brûlée (I like that it auto corrected to 'crime').

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"You're trembling"

“I know. I'm not nervous. Just, I'd like not to fuck this up”

“You honestly couldn't”

“You sound very certain”

“I am. About you. About this”

“You asked me yesterday what I wanted. What do you want Hannibal?”

“Maybe fewer words, just for a little while. Maybe more kisses, fewer clothes. No hello kitty.”

Will smiles. Which is something. Hannibal had worried that something of the earlier encounter with Matthew might have carried through into the evening. Will has very carefully skated around it, but it's probably there, Hannibal sighs,

“My darling, would you like to ask about Matthew now so you can let it go?”

Will pulls away from him and sits down heavily on the sofa,

“Fuck. I am so sorry. I can't stop worrying about it. I did say. I am a worrier. What was it about, who is he?”

Hannibal sits beside him and just leans into his side a little, Will has tensed up and though Hannibal would like nothing more than to just smooth his shoulders or kiss his fears away if he gets this right now it will be much easier in the longer term. He thinks of the way in which sometimes you just

take time in order, ultimately, to save time. And maybe it is better to get this out of the way. To give them a clear run?

“I knew Matthew when we were both children. His parents were and are friends of my father and mother though his father is dead now. You saw Iris today? She's a good friend of my mother’s in particular. It's made something that should have been easy to let pass, hang on much longer than it should. He's also army. But went in much younger. And has worked very hard to get where he is. He was two ranks above me. But with his demotion and my promotion to full Colonel? We're the same now. He might have stalled. But is apparently doing military liaison at the Whitehouse now, which I could imagine suits him. If he can control his temper”

“So what's the deal?”

“We had a very brief relationship. My mistake was that I thought it was a relationship and he thought it a casual affair. His mistake was assuming that he could just string it along even after I knew and had made it clear that I wanted no further part of it. He wouldn't let it go. He probably lost out on a promotion because of it. There was an incident and he was arrested by the MP, sorry, Military Police on the base where we were both stationed.”

He pauses, that had been messy and unpleasant and very painful, Hannibal rolls up his sleeve,

“He left this scar”

“He came at you with a knife? Fucking hell!”

“He was drunk and very angry”

“Did you press charges?”

“There was a hearing. I didn't need to because it's not quite how it works, it was a disciplinary matter especially as in theory he was my superior even if not in my chain of command.”

“It sounds like a mess. I'm sorry. And to carry it around like this”

He traces a finger lightly down the long scar on the inside of Hannibal's arm. Maybe later Hannibal will show him the one across his ribs which was almost much more serious.

“At some point I will ask you to kiss me along any scars I have so I will think only of you when I see them”

“You're a total romantic aren't you?”

“I'm a Soldier. We have a tendency to it”

Will huffs a small laugh,

“All the way back to Troy or something?”

“Earlier I'd say. But yes. You'd give Helen a run for her money”

“Wow. Flatterer”

“Of course. Anyway. In the end Matthew was put back a rank, lost out on a promotion, it went in his record and was probably part of why he was moved not long after”

“And you”

“There was something of a consensus that I'd behaved politely. I was rather more discreet than he was about the whole thing. He shot his mouth off in the officer's mess on several occasions. Not only when I was there. You may have realised today he does not do well with no for an answer”

“And will he try and make trouble for you still”

“I have no idea. He might try. But there's little he can do. He may of course try and communicate with you in some way. I appreciated Iris moving Abigail out of his line of sight. He wouldn't do anything to hurt her deliberately or physically but he is remarkably callous and can be very malicious. His father was a believer in tough love and Matthew thinks it hasn't done him any harm!”

“Oh. That's kind of the worst thing really. How did you end up with him? Somehow I can't see it?”

“Because I was lonely, and he flirted and was very charming, and of course the family connection. And I thought he was interested in something serious and committed.”

“Is that what you're still interested in?”

“With you? Yes. It is. I agree it won't necessarily be especially easy, but I'd like to try. In some ways it was a useful reminder seeing him”

Will leans into him a little more,

“Ok, I'll bite..?”

“Because it helped to shine a light on all the ways in which I utterly adore you. I couldn't even begin to have expected you. I'm hoping it's something you want too?”

Will looks at him and Hannibal thinks he might be relaxing. Which is good. Hannibal would very much like to take him to bed quite soon and take their deepening connection further. He smiles to himself a little, such romantic language. He would like very much to just take him.

“I do want it. I can't do casual. I'm not emotionally wired for it. I have no idea about the long distance bit. But the way we talked yesterday? It was incredibly hot. You have no idea what hell I went through last night when I got to bed!”

Hannibal runs a hand down Will’s side,

“I think I do. And I had hello kitty to stare at me in shock”

“Did you come?”

“No. I had the romantic idea of waiting for you”

Will giggles,

“So did I. And I had the anti-aphrodisiac of Godzilla in the room. I hardly dared breathe!”

“Have I told you enough? Are you alright?”

“He sounds like a shit. If he tries it on with me I'll politely tell him so. If he goes near Abigail even to smile at her I'll sic Bev’s Molly on him. I know she looks soft but she can be terrifying. Or Abigail's teacher, she's pretty frightening too, if you listen to Abigail. It's helped. Sorry. Are you alright?”

“It was an unhappy reminder of a difficult few months. I'm ashamed to say I compounded it by having a fling with a visiting diplomat when I went to see my parents the subsequent Christmas.”

“Wow, you're just full of bad decisions!”

“It gets worse”

He puts an arm round Will who relaxes into him and then puts his own arms round Hannibal and kisses him on the cheek, Hannibal smiles,

“It turned out he was also seeing someone else”

“Alright. That's not great”

“I think you'll enjoy this though. He was seeing Mischa”

“You're sister! Oh my god. You’ve got to be kidding me! What was that? Some weird sibling thing?”

“I think he harboured complicated ideas of some sort of thing involving his wife. She wasn't very impressed. I hadn't realised they were married. Different surnames, different, I'm not sure, aesthetics? Something of the sort. It all came to a head very quickly. Really, it only ran between Christmas and New Year’s Eve.”

“I am sorry. You're telling it in such a funny way. I sort of want to ask what happened?”

“His wife shut it all down very quickly when both Mischa and I arrived for supper. Separately. Even then it took me a while to cotton on that he and Bedelia were actually married. I thought these just been invited too.”

“Oh my God! Definitely not that kind of party then?”

Hannibal laughs, and begins to kiss Will along the side of his face, down his jaw, he moves a hand to gently hold the side of Will’s head, stroke him a little with a thumb,

“Very good, that's more or less exactly what Bedelia said, she threw me and Mischa out and we went and found a bar and compared experience! It could have been a disaster, but in the end we decided to just laugh about it. Helpful really or I'd have possibly berated myself for far longer”

Will laughs again and turns so that he's almost facing Hannibal,

“Can I just say that apart from the whole murdered wife thing I have almost zero romantic or sexual drama in my past. We could call it a romantic vacuum”

He lifts his chin just a little and Hannibal undoes the first button of Will’s favourite blue shirt, he leans in and kisses him on the throat, and then up the side of his neck,

“Lack of interest, or opportunity? It can't be easy being a single father?”

“I'm not entirely sure. It takes quite a lot for me to feel an emotional connection to someone, and it needs a bit more than that for me to feel sustained sexual interest. I can kind of appreciate people. But I've got a lot of empathy so I'm a bit more likely to hold back rather than anything else. And what with Margot? Well.”

Hannibal moves his other hand so he can cradle Will’s face between them and begins to kiss him with more deliberate focus, Will smiles and kisses him back a little,

“And I've got a bit of an atypical synesthetic thing where I sort of taste colours when I touch people. It's a bit overwhelming, until I get used to it.”

Hannibal draws back a little,

“Really? You're extraordinary. What's that like?”

“It's hard to describe, but, people can be a bit much. Bev? Bev's a toucher. She just is. It took ages for me not to panic at it. It's intense. But, eventually, she just tastes like a sort of dark browny-orange red colour. It's got good associations now. Her girlfriend Molly is pink with silver stripes!”

“And Abigail?”

“Really dark sea-green. Like when you look down into water where there's a lot of sunlight. It deepens as it gets darker”

“And me?”

“I'm still learning it. It's good. Don't laugh ok?”

“Of course not”

“It’s sort of something dark, in a good way, and it sparkles”

Hannibal looks at him, feels something tighten and release somewhere inside,

“You really are everything”

Will smiles, and looks at the buttons on Hannibal’s shirt as he starts to undo first the top one, then the next, then the next,

“I think you are”

Chapter End Notes

And I updated the flub over the ranks! I just couldn't bear making Matthew fucking asshat Brown a General. So, quick bit of neat footwork? And thank you to the lovely person on tumblr who explained US ranks to me. Everything I know about the US military comes from Wiki and Lee Child.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 13

Chapter Summary

NSFW

Except for the very end where there are pancakes. Hell yeah. Spot the Dog shaped pancakes!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In Will’s room it is almost entirely dark. Hannibal looks towards the ceiling his breathing slowing, his heart full.

Will is probably almost asleep now. Just one hand pressed against Hannibal’s side. Maintaining the contact but not so much that's he's overwhelmed by it. Their love making was utterly intense and absorbing. Hannibal had previously thought that loud exclamations and ecstatic noise to be the height of his sexual auditory sound track, but Will’s quiet sounds and soft exhalations had been a whole new level of intimate joy.

They'd kept the side lights on at first, both of them laughing about the necessity of clear lines of sight for future erotic epistolary. The deliberate requests and explicit descriptions had led to a kind of escalating foreplay. Hannibal found it hard to describe the mental landscape, perhaps most like a piece of music that circles and moves around a leitmotif that eventually comes back to itself and is perfect in everything it completes and sings.

At one point Will had laughed and reached into a bedside drawer, he'd handed over four very small drawings, the size of credit cards,

“I did these last night, when I couldn't sleep, it didn't exactly help, but it didn't hurt either. For you, like family photos for a wallet! Though obviously not. I've got a little credit card wallet you can put them in. I know it's a bit, but I thought you'd like it”

Hannibal looks at them, tiny pen and line strokes, just ink on card. He's both moved and further aroused. He knows how they will affect him later. He’ll always associate them with this evening, this moment.

“So, ok, I know we haven't done this yet, but you said things about what we liked, or hoped for, or wanted”

“You on your knees. It's..”

“I like this one, see? You can't tell maybe, but you’re watching me, open myself, for you. Like the artist's gaze is your view?”

Hannibal's mouth was dry, the picture shows Will foreshortened, lying on the bed, his head a little forward to watch himself, as he strokes his cock and uses his other hand to finger himself open.

“It's perfect. This too, I can see the warmth between us, though you're not as rounded as this”

“I feel like it, with you, comfortable. And turned on. All the time really.”

This is perhaps his favourite, with Hannibal clearly fucking Will in long deep strokes, They're kissing and Will lies on his back, his head pillowed, he has his arms round Hannibal’s neck, his ankles crossed around Hannibal’s back as he thrusts in. Both their faces are hard to see, because of the angles and the kiss, Hannibal's fringe loose and falling over his face, Will lost into the moment. Like there's no one there but them.

“And this?”

“Like you said, where we’re joined, when you're inside me, my hand guiding you. Can you see?”

Hannibal had carefully put the little cards into the wallet.

“Will you get a mirror for in here? I know it's a cliche but I want us to see. I want to see all of you. See you watching me devouring you, I want to watch you look at me. I want to watch you”

“I will. I'd like that too. All of you? All of me? Everything”

“Can I watch you now?”

“Can I suck you first?”

“Is there a sequence then?”

“In my mind? When I was drawing them. Sure. I suck you, you watch me, you have me. I have you. Yes?”

“Yes. Will.”

“I know. Sit back, or stand, which would you like?”

“Like the drawing”

“Good”

Will had knelt then and pushed Hannibal's pants down and away a little and had quietly and intently sucked Hannibal into his mouth. They had swayed like this. Will making small noises around Hannibal's cock, Hannibal feeling slightly desperate about the intensity of the actions and everything he wanted. But was perhaps a little scared of.

“Enough, it's good, better than, but enough, or else..”

Will had had the temerity and the freedom to laugh,

“Really? Could I make you come from that, it's not much”

Hannibal had pulled him to his feet and urgently taken Will’s shirt and pants and underclothes off him,

“Lie on the bed, please, I beg you, I'll watch you, I can't wait much more, I'm desperate for you”

Will had smiled and slid back on the bed, had relaxed his legs open,

“I haven't done this for a long time, I bought some lube, I hoped you see. For you. Like this? Be a little patient? It'll be good”

When he'd reached down he'd been unable to stop himself arching off the bed a little,

“Oh. I forgot. Uh. That's … and you watching..”

He'd put his head back and then reached back into the side drawer for a small pump of lubricant.

“Here, for you too, let me see you as well”

With a slightly shaky hand Hannibal had taken the pump and squirted some into his palm. He'd passed it back, a slight touch of Will’s hand to his and Hannibal wondered about whether a synesthetic experience might actually jump between people, because, that? That was outside his experience.

“Like this?”

Will had nodded,

“Like that. Yes. Thank you.”

Hannibal had closed his eyes then ‘thank you’? He had a whole chorus of gratitude crowding his head,

“Hannibal? Come here now, please, help me?”

They'd opened him up together then. By the time Hannibal slowly pushed in they were both crying a little. The wound up intimacy and eroticism of the moment, the long, long moment. When Hannibal had circled Will’s cock with his own hand Will had wrapped his hand round Hannibal's tightening it slightly,

“Like that, firm and twist at the head.”

He'd gasped then,

“Like that. God”

Hannibal had moved harder in him and they'd both made some kind of sound that pushed them slightly faster and deeper. They'd kissed so intently and closely Hannibal began to lose sense of where either of them began or ended.

In the end it wasn't a race or a marathon or anything other than a mutual breathing in and out of perfect desire and release. When Hannibal felt Will pulse between them he felt utterly lost and discovered all in one moment, he'd let go then, of fears, or anything he might have let hold him back, of regret, and sorrow. Will had arched up to him as he came inside him. And he had no words or even thoughts for everything in that moment.

While they breathed through each other Will had pushed his head into the crook of Hannibal's neck.

“I know I shouldn't? Not the first time, but I can't help it. I love you. Hannibal, I love you”

“My Will. And I you. Irrevocably”

Hannibal watches him now. The lights properly shrouded. The tiny album on the side table. He’ll put an elastic band round it. Just so he doesn't try to pay for something with the wrong set of cards. He smiles to himself. Will will percolate everything he is and does. He can already feel it. Being absorbed. No before or after him. Just him.

……..

“Hannibal, did you eat breakfast already? Bev is making pancakes. We have a special shaper and everything”

“I saved some space especially for Bev shaped pancakes.”

“They're not shaped like Bev.”

“Hello Kitty then? Or Godzilla?”

She looks at him, for a grown up Hannibal is quite funny sometimes.

“No. Though that's a good idea. Like a puppy, look”

She tips her plate a little so Hannibal can see the full glory of a Spot the Dog shaped pancake.

“I think that might be the best pancake I've ever seen. Do you think Bev will let me have one? I'll ask her. We had juice and coffee and toast for breakfast”

“Did daddy make you have some of the slimy yoghurt and dead fruit? It's gross”

“I heard that, Hannibal, Bev says three pancakes or four, she might have got a bit overexcited with the batter, and Abigail it's dried fruit not dead”

Abigail looks seriously at Hannibal,

“He says that, but it looks dead to me. We had to do a project on Egyptian Mummies”

Hannibal accepts the non-sequitur,

“I think three pancakes please, were the Mummies very dried out then?”

Abigail happily nods round a mouthful of Spot’s back half and waits until her mouth is empty

“That's exactly right. They're very old. Almost the oldest people. That look like people anyway. Miss Bloom said there are older people but some of them are just skeletons”

She says the word carefully, as though she's been carefully corrected, to help her get it right,

“And do you like skeletons?”

“I like everything on the insides. Can I have more jelly on this?”

“How much do you usually have?”

Abigail looks at him, grown ups definitely talk about these these things when children aren't around, otherwise how do they know to ask these questions?

“Maybe a very small spoonful more?”

He nods at her and undoes the lid of the jar,

“Good girl Abigail. I trust you”

She beams at him,

“Oh thank you.”

She leans close to him, beside her at the table,

“Did you kiss my daddy?”

Hannibal blinks,

“Would that be alright?”

“Did he tell you what colour you are? Isn't he clever?”

“Yes he is. Very. Is it alright?”

She nods happily,

"you should always kiss him."

In the kitchen Bev flips Spot the pancake, she eyes Will, leaning against the sink, just in her line of sight,

“Alright then?”

He smiles round his cup of coffee and nods,

“Thank you. Yes. Very. Thank you for taking Abigail”

“Us girls had a great time. She'll tell you about it later. You're doing ok, she likes him, a hell lot. Good job Will”

Will smiles,

“Good job Bev”

Chapter End Notes

And more to come....

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 14

Chapter Summary

Bit of angst...

I do promise though NO MCD or major tag change after forty chapters or anything miserable like that. (God I loved that AU and cried like a drain all through Part five)

Also, this is a hannigram fic. You got that? Right? And a happy ending. Eventually. I goddam promise.

So, expect another 20-30 chapters or so. (Update - about 100 all told!) As now there's a whole damn plot and subplot (ok seven plot threads I know about, no, damn, eight - update - fourteen!) and well hello novel length fic number two for this month.

Good innit (and thank you, writing mojo back and confidence restored)

Chapter Notes

Matthew Brown? Officially an 'ass hat' tech term there.

Abigail knows she must be brave. She knows that Hannibal has to get on a plane. She's had it all explained. But knowing it absolutely doesn't mean she has to like it. She won't sulk though. Sulking always spoils the last bit of the thing that's nice, when you're thinking about the minute it will stop being nice. But she's holds very tight to Hannibal's hand so that he knows she's not enjoying this one bit.

“When we get to the gate, what happens then?”

“Hannibal will show the person his ticket and his passport with the silly picture. Then he'll wave goodbye and then we will go and have a milkshake and write him a letter and the letter will race him back to his tent”

“Bingo. Did you bring the pencils?”

She nods and pats her shoulder bag. She looks up at her daddy, holding her other hand. Really this doesn't quite work because Hannibal should be able to hold both their hands. But she wants to hold them too. It's difficult. Sometimes. Sharing.

“Will they kick you off in London again?”

“I don't know. I hope not. But at least it's only back to Frankfurt”

“No Mischa though?”

“I don't think there's time, I'll get in just in time to get to the hotel, and change and go right out again”

“I'm sorry, you'll be pretty tired by then”

Hannibal huffs a small snort of amusement, glances over at Will,

“I might sleep on the plane a little. With fewer distractions”

Will smiles back. He knows Abigail is making a big effort. Probably both he and Hannibal are too. This is the bit that was always going to the worst, if everything went well. Will is trying out for the whole idea that because he feels like shit it must have been brilliant. He snuffles a small sardonic yay to himself. Hannibal looks at him quizzically,

“I was just thinking if we'd had a terrible time we'd all be so relieved right now that you're going”

Abigail isn't sure about this at all, she likes things clear and much less evasive,

“He doesn't really mean that. He'd be sad anyway. We both would. Honestly, we had a lovely time. I'm so glad you came, even if it was a very long journey. I'm sorry about that. I don't think we can move house very soon because I like Miss Bloom you see?”

“Abigail, it's alright, your daddy was being funny. He meant that we did have a wonderful time together, so you will both be sad when I'm not here. Me too. I shall be very sad.”

Abigail squeezes his hand,

“Don't worry Hannibal, we’ll still love you anyway”

She says it so simply and both the men are grateful for the sometime kindness of children. Will still struggles a little,

“Can you remember which gate Abs?”

“23? I think? Is that right? That's over there. There's a big sign”

“There is a very big sign”

They stop, a little way from the gate where there is already a short queue forming, Will lifts Abigail up so their heads are all at the same height, she puts her arms round Hannibal's neck and kisses him on the cheek.

“You can kiss me and daddy. That's alright”

“I have maybe five more minutes. How many kisses is that Abigail?”

“I don't know. Maybe lots? Maybe not very many but for ages? I kiss Winston for ages sometimes but Buster doesn't like kisses, he gets all licky”

Hannibal smiles and puts his arms round both Abigail and Will,

“I don't think I get all licky, but I think you're trapped Miss Graham, shall we find out?”

He sticks his tongue out just a tiny bit and she makes shocked noises,

“No lick! No lick! Daddy is right, you're related to Buster. NO. Proper.”

She kisses him on the cheek again,

“Like that. Don't lick daddy either he won't like it”

Both Hannibal and Will try not to laugh,

“Maybe Hannibal is good at licking?”

“Don't traumatise the child, here let me kiss you quickly, just to give me a minute to resist behaving like Buster again. Abigail do you want to close your eyes?”

She screws her eyes up tight,

“Promise not to lick”

Too late, Will thinks. It's a short desperate kiss full of yearning shot through with a hot bolt of passion.

Hannibal quickly kisses Abigail on the cheek again,

“All done, your daddy is safe again.”

He hugs her tightly, quickly runs a hand down the side of Will’s face, and steps away, Abigail calls after him,

“There're letters in your bag. For on the plane”

Hannibal looks back at them, smiles and waves, and then gives his ticket and passport to the member of ground staff behind the desk, he turns back to them, both Abigail and Will smiling and waving, he can't re-call anyone ever seeing him off at an airport before. How devastating it is. He waves a final time. And then is gone.

……..

In the cafeteria Abigail chooses a chocolate milkshake and Will buys coffee. They find a place to sit where they can see planes leaving and arriving. She drinks for a minute or two. Not slurping too much. She knows it's annoying but it's more annoying you can never get the last few bits out of a glass.

“He will come back won't he?”

“Yes he will. He just couldn't say when. But he will. I'm sure about that.”

She nods.

“Hannibal sure?”

Somehow over the last day she's started up with this idea that if Hannibal says something it means it's true or real. Will can't help but wonder if this is a new version of needing to see things to believe they are so.

“Yes, I'm pretty certain, Hannibal sure”

She nods again and carries on drinking. Will resists opening the envelope that Hannibal pushed into his jacket pocket when they stood at the gate. He’ll read it later. Just in case it's not Hello Kitty suitable. He smiles a little. That's a shorthand too. How ridiculous.

“Hello Abigail, it is Abigail? Right? You must be Abigail's dad. Are you here with Hannibal?”

Will looks up, the guy from the store. Matthew something very rude Brown. But wearing uniform now so Abigail might not recognise him, he's mildly surprised when she says,

“Is your mummy here to say goodbye?”

“She's not. She thinks I can manage on my own. Mummy's are like that”

Will looks at him, he can't tell if Matthew has somehow in the span of 24 hours been able to find out anything but better to take no chances.

“I didn't have the opportunity to say hello yesterday. Abigail is doing the Adopt a Soldier Program, she wound up with Hannibal. He's been kind enough to visit. I'm Will Graham”

He holds out a hand which Matthew glances at a moment too long before he shakes it, Abigail looks at her daddy and makes a very rude slurping noise with her straw,

“Abs?”

“Sorry. It's gooey at the bottom”

Matthew Brown makes a small face,

“So many things are. So has Hannibal got himself sorted then?”

Abigail looks at him steadily, he's a little bit odd but she's a kind girl,

“He just went. We saw him go through the gate. It's not a real gate. But it's called a gate. He's going to somewhere in Europe”

Matthew smiles at her,

“I know. So am I. I'm a friend of Hannibal's so I expect I'll see him there. We're staying in the same hotel”

She carries on looking at him,

“That's nice then. I like it when I stay with my friends. We went camping last year and it was a lot of fun. I had a sleepover this weekend too.”

“Did you now. That's very nice. What's your friend like?”

“She's called Beverly. She works with daddy”

Matthew looks at Will,

“I don't think anyone said. What's your line of work?”

“Entomologist”

Matthew barks a small sound like a laugh,

“You're a bug guy! Amazing. Bugs? Really? What? College Professor?”

He smirks, and Will fights his own internal battle not to square up,

“That kind of thing”

Abi though is having none of it,

“Daddy works for the Federal Bureau of Investigation”

She says ‘investigation’ like she's saying each syllable oh so carefully, to get it right,

“Important bugs then?”

She nods with such sweet sincerity Will wonders at Matthew’s insouciance in response,

“Well good for you. Hannibal though? Always more of a hawk. Tends to be a bug eater if anything. So, you know, good luck with that. Your wife here?”

Will is sure now that he knows this at least,

“Colonel Brown, I don't want to be rude. But we don't know you well enough to have this conversation, not here, not now. If you want to contact me, you can find me in the FBI directory”

“I've got you. I better get off. Last call I reckon. Long way to Germany. I'll tell Hannibal I had the chance to say hi. Be seeing you. Bye Abigail”

“Bye bye Mr Brown”

He eyes her,

“Colonel, actually”

She smiles at him and then slurps her empty glass again. Will doesn't admonish her and she reckons she might get at least another milkshake out of this.

“Bye Mr Colonel”

He smiles a little at the corner of his mouth.

“Clever girl…Dr Graham”

When he's gone Will turns to her,

“That was a bit rude, but so was he. So, only a small milkshake Abs. Otherwise? Hannibal would be proud of you. For sure”

……

In the steward’s cabin Georgia yawns hugely, God, 72 hour layover minus whatever it was. And another run with Roman. Actually it could be worse. He's usually quite funny, especially if he manages to get someone's number! From where she's standing she can see him half flirting with one of the late arrivals. Another army guy. Full uniform though. He's been bumped up to business.

In first, if she looks in the other direction she can see Colonel Lecter. He'd got bumped too. One better. There'd been one space left and he's in fatigues. Looking every inch the part. He'd smiled at her with such delight when she'd asked after his little girl. Nice that she wasn't ill after all. Poor little thing. Daddy coming home and off again.

He looks tired too, probably a longer flight than their run, and probably going on tonight. God, and they've yet to tell the cabin about the extra stop. This is her third one in two weeks. There will be so much grumbling about it. One of her colleagues joins her

“God! Could Roman be any more obvious? He'll have that guy in the mile high club if he works it any harder”

“You think? He's not that good”

“I think the other guy might be”

They both look down into business class, God if Roman gets his end in they'll never get through second service without him. Damn. She looks at Lawrence,

“Any ideas Mr Wells? Apart from throwing something over the army guy?”

“Do you think the guy in first is his superior officer?”

Georgia looks back again towards Hannibal whose eyes are closed and seat tipped back as far as they are permitted before take off.

“Let’s leave him out of it. I thinks he's pretty tired. We’ll just have to put a leash on Roman. Maybe see if there's an even better prospect but who won't put out on the flight itself?”

Lawrence smiles,

“Like that worked out so well last time!”

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 15

Will scans the email from Sargeant Budge again,

>Dear Dr Graham, Colonel Lecter asked me to email to let you know that as soon as he can he will either email himself or place a call. You'll have seen the news. It's a bit busy here. He says please do encourage Abigail to keep writing, even if it feels a bit like it's going into a black hole at present. (His words.) We've got a VIP in next week so we will probably get some faster mail out then as well. I'll try and make sure he gets a little let up in his schedule to get something down on paper, rather than him dictating to me as we're walking across town between meetings. He can't be sure about a call yet but will try. Please thank Abigail for the card. I'm back now. And really I'm totally ok. Sincerely Tobias Budge Sargeant at Arms<

He reads too the email from the Sargeant's personal account,

>Dear Dr Graham, I couldn't put this in the office email but Sir, and I hope you don't think this forward, I talked to Miriam Lass about this, but Colonel Lecter is definitely very upset about how little time he has to be in contact right now. I really hope you're not pissed about it. Or that Abigail is upset. She's a great girl. We're really fond of her here. I hope I'm not overstepping. Best wishes, Tobias Budge.<

"What you doing Will? You're just staring at that"

Will turns his work lap top round so Jimmy can see,

"Oh"

"Yeah. Oh"

"What's happening then?"

"How does a big fat zero sound"

"Since the trip?"

"No not that bad. I'd have bitched about it before if he'd fucked and run. Sorry. I'm pissed. I knew this could happen but I'm still pissed"

"At him or with yourself?"

"Me. Him. Colonel fucking Brown"

"Mr Colonel?"

"Bev told you about that?"

"She did. Gotta be said that's a winner Will. Five stars to her"

"You're right. She was awesome. I think I managed maybe two stars"

“Better than I'd have managed, or Brian, for that matter. He'd have rolled over and whined and begged not to be kicked again”

“Bev tell you about Frankfurt?”

“She told me he was a bastard”

“That's the long and the short of it. I'm amazed Hannibal didn't punch him”

“If it wasn't for the while ranking officer thing he might have”

“Yeah. Probably. Unfortunately it just underlined that Abigail is our weak spot.”

“Of course she is. He's just an almighty shit to use it”

Will sighs,

“What should I say?”

“To which email?”

“I don't know? Both of them, either of them?”

“You done?”

Will stares at him,

“Fuck no, of course not. Shit. Is that what I sounded like?”

Jimmy makes a so so face,

“God. Not at all. That's the fucking problem. I hate it so much. It's killing me. Abs is being brilliant. She's written and done him drawings, I've been slow to send them because I don't know what to say! I'm the bad guy here. And he doesn't even know it”

He runs a hand over his face,

“If anyone screws this up it will be me”

“Will, you miss him. The end. That's ok. He knew it, you knew it. You're allowed to say so. Hell you can even whine a bit, just, don't bottle it up, or only tell us. Tell Hannibal. It's love right?”

Will nods but doesn't say anything,

“Lucky sod. Alright. Tell him that too. Fuck it Will don't write anything long. Just be honest. Hasn't put him off so far has it?”

“Help with the email Jim. Just so I don't lose my nerve?”

“Sure, shove over..

>Dear Sargeant Budge (“that's kind of a 60s sit com name for a solider isn't it?” “Not helping Jim”) Thank you for the email. Abigail has amassed a large collection of post. It's me who's been holding everything up. Post on its way asap. Abigail is delighted you're alright. I'll pass on your greetings.

Please also tell the Colonel it’s alright at our end and we're both hoping everything is there. You're right, we have seen the news. If he gets a chance for a call that'd be great but we won't hold our breath. It's fine. Really. He should save them for when there's a fire! Otherwise we’ll just be tempted at our end to light matches! Seriously, we’re fine. And we really appreciate the concern. Please give Private Lass a hello from both of us too. Sincerely Will Graham<

“See, that's ok. Isn't it? And will you really put some post in the mail?”

“This afternoon, I've got the mailer in the car with Abi’s things in it. I am an idiot”

“Yeah. A prize one. Olympic class. Get the paper out, do the whole hand written thing”

“I only ever hand write them”

“Definitely love then!”

……..

“Will? I'm sorry, the line is awful and I've got seven minutes”

“Hannibal, I honestly don't care about the line. Are you alright?”

“I'm alright. I miss you terribly. That's a bit of a disaster. I hadn't realised how bad it would be. I'm sorry”

“I've got Abigail to keep me on the straight and narrow”

He pauses a moment,

“Actually you do too”

There's a crackle and for a moment Will wonders if they've lost the connection, it cuts into something Hannibal had been saying,

“It shouldn't be for too long but at least a week. But after that I hope so”

“I missed the first bit?”

“Oh? Oh the line. We're going to be out for a bit. Listen there's just a chance I might be asked to come and speak at some thing either in Geneva or Paris. Is there any chance at all you might come. We'd get the Friday through Monday off.”

Will is quiet for a moment,

“Hannibal, I'm not sure if my passport is even still valid”

The line is silent again, then there's another crackle,

“Not to worry then. Just a thought”

Even on the awful line he can hear Hannibal managing the disappointment, trying to sit light to Will’s lack of enthusiasm, Will hates it,

“Hannibal, when is it? I'm sure I can get it, or something, Jack can pull some strings or he'll know someone who can”

“You'll try?”

“Of course. Shit. Of course I will”

“Can you bring Abigail?”

“I'll have to think about that. She'd miss school. I know she'd love to see you. She's desperate to. Ok, I'll think about that. But I definitely will.”

“Thank you so much. To be honest, I'm not sure what I'd have done if you'd said no. Considered the possibility of going awol maybe”

Will laughs,

“God, don't do that. And look, we do understand, I'm sorry to have been a shit about it”

“No, it's fine. Really. Damn, I'm running out of time. I love you Will. Sargeant Budge will let you know times and dates, tell him about Abigail. Actually he's coming, he'd love to meet her. I've probably got a team this time. A miracle in and of itself. I'm sorry. I'm talking too much. I love you. I have to go”

“I love you Hannibal, Abi too. Utterly”

He hears a small happy laugh from the handset before the line goes dead. Will can't really imagine the circumstances or the set up for when and how Hannibal manages to call. Maybe there's a rota or something?

And, wow. Paris or Geneva? And damn he should talk to Miss Bloom, see what she says. Before he talks it over with Abigail, and just how much she will hate him if he goes without her. Unless one of the grandparents would have her? That’d be a good alternative. Even Abigail might be torn. His dad would love it. Margot’s mother too. And the less said about Margot’s father the better. Though he is good with Abi. For the most part. Just don't get him started on anything SJW!

Will has one of those slow motion realisations that irrespective of whether Abi comes with him or goes to one or other set of grandparents he is going to have to tell them soon that he's seeing someone. In the military. Posted overseas. And a guy to boot. Oh that's going to go so well. One of the three is going to go ape-shit. Or Margot's brother will. Matthew Brown, by comparison, is really a walk in the park!

……..

Ah, not such a walk in the park then, more, well, the FBI car park,

“Colonel Brown? I can't believe you've come out here to see me, surely?”

“I didn't really. I'm tacking it on. Guy at the front desk told me which was your car”

Oh that's just perfect thinks Will, he might be in a uniform but even Will knows the markers for psychopath,

“Ok. What would you like to say?”

“Are you seeing Hannibal?”

Will decides not to make any jokes about not really seeing someone several thousand miles away,

“That's right. Yes”

“Your little girl ok with that?”

“Thank you, yes”

“Alright. He tell you the backstory?”

“His version of it, obviously”

“Yeah. At least you realise that. Look I'm not going to fuck it up for you. You seem, actually I have no idea, but, Hannibal is great, I've known him since we were kids. He's a sweetheart. He's also a possessive, monopolising bastard who wants things on his terms or not at all”

Will manages to say fairly mildly,

“I think most of us are in pursuit of what we want”

“Yeah? Maybe. But he can be obsessive. He was furious when I wouldn't play ball. The whole long term thing? Nuh uh. But he wouldn't accept that's not how I do things”

“It sounds then like incompatible wants, needs or expectations Colonel”

“And that's what exactly?”

“A surefire recipe for conflict. Really it sounds like it turned out best for both of you? Look, I don't want to fight. And I'm not sure there is anything to fight about. You wanted one thing Hannibal wanted something else. Isn't that it really?”

Matthew looks at him,

“Hannibal and I are more alike than I realised. He just worked it out faster than I did. I'll admit that, yeah? I was wrong. He was right”

“Oh.”

“Yeah ‘oh’, look you're ok, but as soon as Hannibal realises he can have me on the terms he wanted, he's going to be right back”

Will just looks at him,

“And what? You think I should do the decent thing and duck out?”

“I don't know. Are you decent? He’ll come back regardless of what you do. I'm just trying to make it easier on you”

“Well, I guess all I can say is that the effort is noted”

Matthew nods,

“Alright then. As long as you understand.”

He smiles then, a long thin slice,

“I play to win.”

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 16

“What do you think Miss Bloom?”

Alana Bloom, Abigail’s teacher leans back in her seat,

“I appreciate that you're even asking. Most parents would apologise after rather than ask permission before. You need to sell it to me a little more”

Will takes a deep breath, he'd asked Sargeant Budge for suggestions about this,

“Ok, so I've been in touch with one of the guys at the base who’s helping put together the program, he'll actually be in Paris with Hannibal. He suggested we might get some happy Soldier/little girl pictures and use it in their newsletter. I'm ok with that. It'd promote the program and Abi would love it. One of the soldiers describes himself as African American and the other is a woman so, well, a win for diversity. And Abigail is a little girl without a mummy. They'd lean on the whole, ‘we all make a family’, ‘raise a child together’, side of things”

Alana nods her head a little,

“I can see that. Yes. For the program. And how would it be using those pictures here? As part of the school brochure? Or on the website? Community engagement, support the troops, what about that?”

Will considers,

“Yeah, maybe. We'd go on the Friday, and come back on the Monday. She'd be back in school Wednesday. My back up is her grandparents. But we might face an Abi backlash if I go and she doesn’t.”

Miss Bloom looks at him,

“Dr Graham, can I ask, is this about more than the program?”

Will nods,

“Yeah. That obvious?”

She smiles sweetly at him,

“You buried the lead. I'm a sucker for a good romance. I think I can swing it with Mr Sutcliffe. I'm thinking maybe some drop dead cute pictures and I'd like for her to write about going to Paris, and do show and tell? Maybe a little something for the next parent’s evening? And you promise by Wednesday? Three days is better than a week”

Will smiles in relief,

“The only way she won't be here is if we're still stuck somewhere stupid because of the weather”

They both stand, unwinding themselves from the tiny chairs behind the tables in Abi’s classroom,

“Remind me again why we sat on these chairs? Why do parents do this and not sit on the tables!”

“Dr Graham! No one sits on the tables in our classroom!”

He laughs,

“And that'd be why! Miss Bloom. I'm so grateful. Thank you. Abigail will love you even more, if that were possible”

……

“Hey, Miriam, we got the email back from Dr Graham.”

“Yeah? Is he coming Sarge? Please say yes. Apart from the whole meet and greet thing, I'm not telling the Colonel if they're not.”

“And then some! Nah, we’re good, they are. Oh my god. Fight you for who tells the Colonel!”

“You pulling rank?”

“I think I am. Please, I've got to be the bearer of some good news this week.”

“Sir”

Sargeant Budge laughs and prints out the email,

>Dear Sargeant Budge, I'm attaching copies of our crispy new passports, which please tell Colonel Lecter were hell to arrange at this notice. I might have hocked myself to the FBI for the rest of my life. Abigail is very happy to know she will be meeting you and Private Lass. Can I just say you've created a monster and you'll be the one dealing with that! I've told her we can't bring the dogs to be in the pictures which caused major pouting (clearly another officer in your unit?) And that she can't bring six pairs of shoes, or have her Hello Kitty Plushy in them either. Any other restrictions you can help me with? Restrictions on pink would be good, for clashes with camo reasons. Alright. You can tell the Colonel we're both excited to be coming. And excited to meet you both too. Thank you for all your help, really, sincerely, Will Graham (yeah, I won't wear pink either)<

……

Mischa Lecter picks up the mail as she leaves her apartment building in the middling nice bit of Brussels where she lives. Bill, bill, circular, bill. Oh, letter, from Hannibal, she smiles to herself and opens it as she walks along the road. Her smile broadens and then she makes a small face to herself. Paris? It must be serious then. She smiles a little. Really? Paris. That would be almost 100% romantic if it wasn't for the fact that their parents live there too. But that's probably not the primary factor. Or maybe that is the point? She wonders if Hannibal has told their mother. Or is hoping she will?

……

“Mischa darling, so are you going to come for dinner then?”

Mischa sighs into her phone, somehow she feels like she might end up doing a fair amount of soothing of parental feelings, she stretches her feet out on her sofa and scratches behind the ears of the grumpy Siamese cat on her lap, one blue eye and one green,

“On the Saturday, mother? Yes I think so. I assume Hannibal told you?”

“I can't believe he'd rather go to that place but there we are. I assume a little much for a first meeting to come to us?”

“A little. How much did he say?”

“He was very positive. And he sent a lovely picture of the little girl, who is frankly adorable.”

She puts the accent on it in the French way. Mischa wonders if her mother has quite got it,

“Did he send a picture of Abigail's father too?”

“There was a picture of ‘annibal and the little girl with another man. Is that he?”

“Mother, it's the man that Hannibal is seeing. It's not the girl's mother”

Her mother is silent for a moment,

“But after Matthew? I thought that, well…”

“Matthew was Matthew, he hasn't fundamentally changed who Hannibal is. He's still gay mother.”

“But the little girl?”

“Her mother is dead. Hannibal must have mentioned the ‘Adopt a Soldier’ business? Yes?”

Her mother is quiet again,

“So that's how they met?”

“Yup. Mother, please, Hannibal is over the moon. He's had a shit time. Let's be happy for him maybe?”

“But what about Matthew? Iris said they bumped into each other in Baltimore. And that they spent the weekend at some event in Frankfurt?”

“They were at the same conference. I suspect Hannibal would rather not be in even the same country as Matthew. He caused a scene mother! On the flight, and at the event. And he's subsequently been very rude to Will and his daughter.”

“He certainly shouldn't drag the girl into it. That's not at all nice. Poor little thing. Mischa?”

“Mother?”

“You haven't met them yet have you?”

“It’ll be my first time as well. Look he seems great. And think about it this way, if it all worked out you'd actually end up with a grandchild of a sort too!”

“Oh. Well. Your father would adore that. And she is such a precious age too. What is she? Eight or so?”

“I guess. I haven't exactly asked. Maybe. So, will you be kind? Or should I warn Hannibal you're going to play hardball?”

“I think I can be expected to know how to behave Mischa. Tell ‘annibal we’ll come for sure. Oh, Muraskai will be in Geneva that week. I wonder if she might be persuaded too? I'll ask her. Robertus isn't here but that would be lovely!”

Faintly Mischa says,

“Oh right. Guy flies how ever many miles with his little girl straight into the lion’s den. Perfect.”

“Well if you think he can't manage, do say Mischa”

“I have no idea. I'm sure he'll step up. Hannibal isn't an idiot.”

She thinks of Matthew Brown and Anthony Dimmond,

“Well, not always.”

…….

“Daddy? Hannibal will be there to meet us won't he”

They've had this conversation several times already.

“Sweetheart, either Hannibal will be there or Sargeant Budge or Private Lass. One of them, for sure.”

“And we put our bag in the plane and they give it back at the end of the journey?”

Will smiles and pulls her into his lap, Winston moves his head and rests it on Abigail's leg looking at her with big wet eyes,

“Is there something worrying you Abs?”

“He does still love us doesn't he?”

“Is that really what's worrying you?”

She curls tighter into his side, and whispers,

“I don't want him to go away like mummy did.”

He cuddles her and kisses her,

“Sweetie, you know daddy does a job that is a little bit dangerous just sometimes?”

She quietly mouths,

“I know.”

“But that someone has to do it really?”

She nods again, this is something that they've talked about too,

“Hannibal's job is like this. You remember? Before Christmas? When there was trouble at their base? But he was ok after. He didn't get hurt. But Sargeant Budge did? Though he's ok now? Hannibal can't promise he won't get hurt. He tries not to. But he has to look after other people too. And the day after tomorrow we will see him, and Sargeant Budge and Private Lass, and we might even get to meet Hannibal's sister. That's fun isn't it?”

“Does she look like him?”

“I don't know sweetie. She's a bit younger than him, but maybe? We’ll find out. Hey you could work out all the ways they're the same and different?”

“They're not twins though?”

There is a pair of twins in Abigail's class and they're an endless source of fascination to the rest of the children.

“No, not twins, just brother and sister.”

“Like Mummy and Uncle Mason?”

“That's right, quite like that. Ok Abs?”

She nods a bit,

“Sorry”

“You don't ever need to be sorry Abigail. It's ok to worry, it's ok to be sad, it's always ok to tell me, or Hannibal. You can tell him too. Especially if you can't tell me. Or you want to ask him something that you don't want to ask me? Alright?”

“Hannibal sure?”

“Hannibal sure.”

She kisses him and then ruffles Winston’s ears. Winston looks mildly unimpressed but tolerant.

“And we really can't take Buster or Winston? We could make them fit in a really small space. I don't mind sharing.”

Will smiles at her, they've had this conversation at least twice daily and it's only increasing in density the closer they get to departure day,

“Did you look at the pictures Private Lass sent of the seats?”

Somehow Hannibal has swung First Class for both of them. Straight up. Private Lass had mentioned something about frequent flier miles and a bunch of them pooling their allowances which Will sincerely hopes isn't true even though it'll be awesome for Abigail. God, he owes the two members of Hannibal’s unit big time. And he hasn't forgotten the personal email from Sargeant Budge and the mild infraction of rules he'd committed.

“I could make myself really small?”

“Not happening Abigail. And anyway, they don't have passports”

Abigail opens her mouth to reply, but she can't quite think of a suitable answer. That's quite annoying. She hadn't even thought of that before. And it was difficult getting her's and daddy's passports. She resolves to be extra nice to Buster and Winston over the next day or so, just to make it up to them.

…….

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 17

Bev leans her chin on Will’s shoulder as he finishes up his email for the day. She puts her arms around him in a loose hug,

“Little too much Bev”

She eases back a little,

“Ok?”

“Thanks. Yeah. Sorry. Bit jittery about the whole thing I guess”

“No shit! The parents! Nice one. I love that's he'd sorted everything and then sprung it on you.”

“Yeah. Me too. But Abigail is very excited.”

“Ok, this I gotta hear, how did you explain”

“I will tell you if first you make me coffee, then remind me how the out of office works so I can leave a signature on it saying when I'll be back”

“It's only next Wednesday”

“Do you remember when we went to Connecticut for two days?”

“And came back two weeks later? Sure. I remember.”

“I nearly got done for contempt.”

“Oh yeah. I'd forgotten about that. Sorry, it was kind of funny.”

“Great. Coffee. Or no gossip for you to laugh about”

She laughs and lets go of him, Jimmy wanders into the room reading a file,

“Hey! You're still here? Have you packed?”

“Three different times. You're good at this kind of thing; what the hell do I wear to meet the out-laws?”

“You're meeting Hannibal's parents?”

“Oh. I'm amazed Bev hasn't already told you. You got time Jim? take a seat, actually give Bev a shout and she'll make you coffee too, before I tell you about how that conversation went down with Abigail”

Jimmy laughs too,

“Bev? BEV! Coffee for me too, white two sugars”

“You'd don't take sugar?”

“Precautionary. I think I might need it. Please, tell me this is going to be a good one?”

“Oh Abigail is just all over this. And please just focus for a second, suit? Jacket and pants, decent shirt and tie? No tie? What fucking tie? Or shoes? I expect Hannibal will wear his dress uniform. Bastard.”

“Does he looks good in it?”

“I don't know I've only seen pictures. He wore fatigues coming and going, and no, that's not a euphemism! Mind out of the gutter Jimmy”

Jimmy smirks at him and waggles his eyebrows

“Really Will? So non-inquisitive! Uniforms! Phwoar! Where are you meeting them?”

“Early dinner, because of Abigail. Hannibal called it supper. Supper! In some fancy place that is also supposed to adore children. Well, they better.”

“Abigail too? She's not having a minder?”

“Apparently not. And I also apparently don't get a huge say in this!”

Bev comes back with a small tray,

“Coffee for the romantic lovelorn fool, and one for Will too”

Both the men give her the evil eye, she smiles and makes a get on with it gesture with her hand,

“Come on then, tell us the whole deal?”

“Ok originally the meeting could have been Paris or Geneva, some General decided Paris, Hannibal says it's because the guy is having a thing with some French politician. Anyway. I just said I didn't really care which. Then he mentions, actually he doesn't mention because this bit was all done through his poor Sargeant who I have to say will have to be a flower boy or something, or whatever it is you have. And I was thinking well it's romantic, and then Sargeant Budge says, oh by the way Colonel Lecter’s sister is able to get away from her job in Brussels, which is some European Community thing. She'll be able to join you for dinner on Saturday. And I think, oh that's nice. Hannibal's sister, hopefully she'll have the whole sibling spill the beans thing down pat. So I say, that's lovely, thank you, we're looking forwards to it. Then he says, oh by the way did the Colonel mention that his parents live in Paris and they happen to be available so they're coming to dinner too. And I think, oh fuck, and then the Sargeant sends a ps. This is the kicker, Hannibal's aunt, who is Japanese, is in Geneva for something, and hey Geneva is only a country or so away so what the hell, she's coming too! Bonus! For the win.”

Bev laughs loudly,

“Fantastic. Mom, dad, aunt and sister! That's just excellent!”

“Not done yet”

“You're kidding? What? Random cousin?”

“Oh no. It turns out it's Hannibal's fucking birthday - 20th January. Which is Sunday, but you know. Whatever. Just kill me now”

Bev shakes her head and tries and fails not to laugh again,

“That is just awesome Will! And I'm still waiting for the thing about Abigail!”

“Ok. So I'd just got my head round this lot and Abigail is burbling on about something and I suddenly realise I'm going to have to explain to her. The sister bit was easy because of Mason. But she went all quiet when I explained about Hannibal's parents and aunt.”

“Ok. So what did she say?”

“It's priceless, they're going to love it, what she actually said was ‘are they my new meemaw and grannypap?’ I couldn't decide whether to kiss her or just cry then and there. Hannibal's family are fucking aristocrats!”

“Does Mischa have any children?”

“Nope. And nor do the aunt and uncle, no cousins”

“Wow! So you've rocked up with ready made grandkid! Nice one Will!”

“I am so fucked! This is either going to be a blast or a total nightmare. I said I felt jittery? I think I'm closer to hysterical actually”

Bev pokes him in the shoulder and he pokes her back, Jimmy looks at him with a querying look on his face,

“Ok. Will. And nice story by the way. Can you just back up a tick? What do you mean nobility, wait, you said aristocrats?”

“Oh yeah. Right. I only know this because it's in his fucking passport, Hannibal's father is a Count. He’ll inherit the castle and the title”

Bev and Jimmy look at each other and Bev says faintly,

“There's a castle?”

“Yeah. Lithuania. Which is where the family is all from originally, a while back now. His dad and uncle were both US army too, some WW2 thing I think. Anyway, Soviet Union rather did for the whole extended estates but after the revolution? Hello castle Lecter again. It's looked after by some retainer. Hannibal has this idea we might go when he gets two weeks RnR in the summer. Ok Jims? Count Lecter. Hannibal will be the eighth.”

“Wow. Ok. That takes me back to the other question, you'll have to back up further in the conversation”

“Shoot..?”

“Will, you mentioned about Tobias Budge being a flower boy”

Will looks at him in surprise,

“I did? Oh. Shit. You know I just said shoot?"

They nod and laugh,

"I meant shoot me. I am hysterical"

Bev smiles at him,

“Sure you want me to set the out of office just until Wednesday?”

“Shut up. God. And Jimmy, still? The suit? The tie? And what the fuck do I get him for his birthday! I've got, oh, five hours tomorrow, when I'm not panicking about, well, what I originally thought might be a nice smoochy touristy weekend”

“Yeah, about that? How's that going to work out?”

“With hello kitty? Sorry, indoors code for what to do when Abigail is there and we're hoping she doesn't get too many ideas to share with all her school friends. She's already told them Hannibal is a good licker”

Jimmy and Bev both laugh helplessly,

“That's just wildly inappropriate! How on earth did she come up with that? And more to the point what did Miss Bloom say?”

“Oh it was her who told me. She very nicely suggested that we be a little more careful! Behind being furiously embarrassed I couldn't even begin to work out how to explain it was all to do with the Dog!”

Bev and Jimmy laugh harder,

“Oh my god, somehow that's way worse!”

……

Abigail sits on Will’s hip, one arm round his neck, she's already chosen Hannibal a Godzilla tie-pin which privately Will thinks Hannibal will probably find a way to wear everyday, maybe inside the lapel of his uniform. She's just debating whether she wants to get him Godzilla cufflinks as well or if this might be classified as too much of a good thing. She's heard her dad say this, and really it seems unlikely, but worth some passing consideration.

After the conversation with Jimmy and Bev Will had felt much better, he had gone home and packed a nice suit which wasn't too over the top and appropriate shoes and then three ties on Jimmy's advice when he'd sent a photo to him. They'd both gone to sleep at a sensible time. Come the morning Abigail was packed ahead of time, the dogs had got off to their preferred kennels and instead of both of them getting worried they’re now trawling through the airport duty free looking for presents.

Will has decided not to go for presents for everyone else. Bev had suggested that really they could think of him as the present. He'd laughed and said,

“Sacrificial lamb more like!”

In the end he hadn't even got round to explaining any more about what Abigail had said about Hannibal's parents. Really that could probably wait until there was a suitable part two to share. This was more of an appetiser.

“What shall I get him Abs?”

“Have you made him a card?”

Will thinks of the three credit card sized erotic drawings he has done. And he faintly wonders what would happen about them if he got searched at customs. He's never even left the continental US. Do they check for things like that? And how weird is it to have pen and ink drawings of yourself in very compromising positions with someone else?

“I have Abs. It's just a gift. I haven't really thought of anything. I only found out yesterday”

“Maybe he isn't a present person?”

Abi knows there are some people like that, though she thinks it is a shame,

“Maybe. We’ll have to think about it. Now cufflinks and tie-pin? Important question Abs can you ever have too much Godzilla?”

She looks relieved and shakes her head, this is the answer. You never can.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 18

"Hannibalhannibalhannibalhannibal we're here and we were on the plane and I went in the cabin with the captain and he let me fly it a little bit and they gave me a bag with my own toothbrush even though I have one already and some slippers especially for me and they made me sandwiches because I didn't like the dinner and a pillow and the lady said she met you and she called you my daddy and you are like my other daddy and it was very exciting and I slept for a very long time because the seat was so comfty but lots of people were very tired and grumpy and I watched the television which was in the seat in front of me and daddy had two drinks of something he wouldn't let me have any of it but that was alright because I had juice and there was a funny man who gave everyone drinks and he said he thought you were nice too and the lady poked him then and daddy made a face and hello."

Hannibal lifts Abigail up and swings her round just a tiny bit, because if you can't be utterly over excited when you are eight when can you be?

"Hello my lovely girl, it sounds very good indeed, here let me kiss you and I promise no licks"

"She told Miss Bloom you're a good licker. It's done my reputation no end of good with the other parents and teachers"

Hannibal carefully sets Abigail down, who then just buries her face in the side of his waist holding him round his legs, he smiles and just breathes, and Will steps right into his arms

"Hannibal"

They're moderately discreet, but both of them are slightly flushed when they draw apart from the kiss.

"My dearest love. Have you everything? Sargeant Budge is at some waiting area with a car. Back to the hotel first, settle in a little? And then.."

He pulls back a little and rubs Abigail's head with a hand,

"How about it? Then you can meet Private Lass? Do you need to sleep more? Does your daddy?"

Abigail looks at Will and then back at Hannibal,

"He might be a bit tired. I woke up a bit early. The time was all funny. Is it morning?"

"It is, it's Saturday morning, we're six hours ahead here"

Abigail blows out her cheeks,

"Daddy showed me on the map. Can we have breakfast"

Will smiles at her a little, and takes her hand as they walk with Hannibal across the airport arrivals concourse,

"We can, back at the hotel. Where I would very much like a shower and a lot of coffee"

“Daddy had three cups on the airplane. He asked the lady to give him the whole jug”

Hannibal tries not to smile too much,

“You didn't meet Georgia did you? She was the one who slapped Matthew when he started being obnoxious!”

“Damn, I wish I'd known. She was terrific. They all were. I am a bit tired. And given we have the whole family this evening I'd quite like to try and get some feeling back in my legs and back.”

“Right, of course. I'm sorry. Mischa says I'm terrible for inflicting our parents on you. I'm truly sorry. It seemed like such a perfect opportunity.”

“Yeah? Keep going. I'm waiting for any other really brilliant ideas you’ve had”

Hannibal looks at him and twists his head slightly,

“Really that bad? I can cancel. They'd understand”

“You've got to be kidding me. Not a chance. And you have no idea how excited Abigail is about it. Abs? About Hannibal's parents and aunt? This evening?”

Abigail turns a look on him that is so adoring and possessive and quite terrifying that Hannibal begins to have an inkling of some of the worry it might have caused Will,

“I've brought my birthday dress. I think they'll like it very much, and a picture of Winston and Buster in their bow ties, so that they can see them properly. And I brought pictures of mummy’s mummy and daddy and my uncle and daddy’s daddy. So they could see too”

Hannibal blinks at Will, ahh, yes, family goes both ways, nervously he says,

“Will?”

“Or we're up for it, can I just say, and this is mostly me and maybe a little bit the science team who will frankly kill you if this goes badly, but there will be a reckoning! At some point. And my dad has got to be seen to be believed, and I'm not even telling you a word right now about Margot’s daddy. Isn't that right Abs? What's you're grandpa like!”

“He is a ‘mean arsed cussed son of a bitch’ I like him very much”

“Don't give me that look Colonel Lecter, now tell me is that guy waving at us desperately Sargeant Budge because honestly I'm beginning to recognise the facial tics of everyone in your line of fire”

“You're annoyed?”

“Oh, only a bit. Coffee. Breakfast. Shower. No, and Abigail I'm going to swear just a minute and usually I wouldn't but I'm tired ok? No fucking hello kitty for at least an hour and you better have sorted that out or I'm smacking you in front of all your team”

Hannibal stops him by the arm and kisses him again,

“I am so relieved to see you”

Will manages a small snort,

“Do you think we might ever meet when we've had more than a few hours sleep and for longer then three days? Hannibal? God! Your parents! What were you thinking? Come on. I haven't punished you enough…… Sargeant Budge, I can't tell you how glad I am to meet you thank you”

“Sir, let me have your bag. We've got another five minutes before the guys with the guns give me a hard time, I've got the cd plates but you know?”

“I have no idea. But the gun bit worked for me. Abigail darling, this is Sargeant Budge? You know”

She smiles, a little shyly, but when he drops to his knees and then salutes, she hugs him,

“I'm very glad you are ok”

Hannibal watches Will watch Abigail and his Sargeant discuss the dog tags round his neck and the coloured bits of ribbon on his chest signifying service in the theatre of war. Will looks back up at Hannibal,

“It's ok. Really. I couldn't be happier. Apart from the shower. And not enough no hello kitty”

“And this is now our go to euphemism?”

“It's that or licking”

……..

It's clear after only ten minutes that Abigail has enchanted Miriam Lass, possibly even more than she has Tobias Budge. They agree that they will go and get ice cream and maybe a hair band which Abigail has forgotten and would like to wear this evening.

“Sir, might we take Abigail? We'll be back in an hour, or longer if you'd prefer?”

She's looking at Will, but Will knows at least some of this is asking permission from her boss,

“I'm ok with it, I think, let me think, ok, Abigail, ok to go with Private Lass, you can call me any time if you're worried, ok? Private Lass, this is my cell number, I take it you have Hannibal's. Don't for gods sake let go of her hand. Especially with the roads. Shit. What side do they drive on here? Ok. Please.”

“Sir I have nieces sir, four of them, two per hand”

“Alright. Please?”

Private Lass looks at him properly,

“I promise Sir”

He nods, he trusts Abigail with Bev, with Molly, with lots of their friends. And really? He trusts Hannibal with these people. He’ll try.

“Ok, about an hour. Maybe not too far”

“Sir”

“Abigail, I know you're excited”

He looks at her, she's all glittery round the edges when he takes her hand, he smiles at her and pulls her closer to him as he crouches down in front of her,

“Ok. Only to the hotel cafe in the lobby. And to the shops there. Can you remember how many there were?”

“There were four”

“Good. So you can go in all four. And the cafe. And not outside the hotel. Promise? And you will stay with Sargeant Budge and Private Lass the whole time. You must hold one of their hands. The only time you don't have to is when you are sitting in the cafe and they are right there. Ok? No sliding off or hiding to be funny?”

She nods seriously, she's got it, he smiles at her again, then stands up,

“Good. Private Lass, this isn't a reflection on you at all, she's too over excited. Staying in the hotel will ensure none of us regret this. She does need to get rid of some of the energy, I'd be grateful if you took the stairs. Abigail?”

She nods urgently,

“I absolutely Hannibal promise”

“Ok then. You better”

He watches the two adults leave and takes a deep breath, the whole synesthetic thing can be very, very useful if he pays attention and lets himself trust it. Even if it means disappointing Abigail. She knows too. And he's right, this will let her fizz a little and wear the two soldiers out, and be safe with them, and practice with other adults. He turns to Hannibal,

“An hour, I still need coffee, and a shower, please come with me?”

Hannibal smiles,

“How did you know about Abigail?”

“She was glittering. It was too much. She wouldn't mean to but she'd get too clever for herself. Better like this. And she knows I know. Which also helps her.”

“Extraordinary. You're.. let me show you the room and the layout, see if you approve?”

“Oh, it's fine, I think it was Private Lass sent me the pictures, asked if I wanted the second largest or the largest bed. I said the largest as you're tall and frankly like to hog the space”

“You said that to Miriam?”

“No, but you should see your face. Come with me, show me the shower, maybe some other things? Yes? I'm still too over-excited and mildly hysterical too. Help me with that? I could do with dialling it back a little. We've been slightly over the top the last three days. You?”

“Also, probably. Maybe since I talked to mother?”

“Shit got real, real fast?”

“I wouldn't quite say that, but, yes, there's truth in that”

“I know. Ok. Deep breaths and let's try the whole not say very much thing”

“I'd like to take you to bed”

“Shower first and then please do. Lots of long slow kisses, and I hope you brought some lube, oh, I brought you more pictures, but I'll save them for tomorrow. So, kisses?”

He pulls Hannibal to him and makes good on that,

“Come and undress with me, shower, I've missed you so badly. I might have overdone the whole masturbate thing the last week or so”

“Oh Will. Please? Now?”

“Yeah. I'll drink coffee later. God, Hannibal, do that again”

“This?”

……

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 19

Chapter Summary

I know there are some amazing writers amongst you... yeah! You! I had this awesome suggestion dm on tumblr.. sounds like solid gold to me! *whines* pleeeease? Someone?

Adopt a Soldier AU Crack Edition

Hannibal's black sheep of the family twin brother Nigel attends family dinner after epic guilting from their mother. Will isn't sure about this development cos he can tell Nigel is into some shady business. But Abigail likes him cos he fucking loves Godzilla. She proceeds to wrap Nigel round her little finger and when Matthew Brown crashes the vacation and threatens her, Nigel helps Hannibal make that little problem go away XD

Bonus: Nigel buys her the pinkest hello kitty hoodie known to man!

(Can I just say Abi would love twin Hannibals!)

Sargeant Budge hisses to Private Lass as they climb the final flight of stairs to the floor where the Colonel’s suite is located,

“Do you think we've given them enough time?”

Private Lass checks her watch,

“Seventy three minutes? We better go back. We said an hour”

Abigail tugs her hand,

“Can we go and have breakfast with daddy and Hannibal? Please?”

“Yes we can. How was the milkshake?”

“It was delicious, thank you. Next time I'll ask daddy for some money so it can be my treat”

Miriam makes the kind of face that adults make when they think a child is impossibly cute,

“That's alright honey, it was a pleasure. Do you want to knock?”

Abigail knocks on the main door, and Will opens it a moment or two later,

“Hey curly girlie, good job. And we didn't even need to send out the cavalry! Because! Oh look they were bringing you back. Folks, thank you so much. I've finally worked out the coffee maker,

please come in and have some whilst we try and figure out the rest of today and tomorrow and Monday."

"That's nice of you Sir"

"Ok, I asked your boss, you can call me Dr Graham or stick with the 'sir' if that's better for you. Do this a few more times and I'll be Will or there'll be problems. Alright? So, black? Or cream and sugar? Abigail? What did you drink and eat? We've fruit here and non slimy yoghurt and croissants. Do you remember what they are?"

"They go everywhere?"

"They do, if you want them Hannibal is going to help you put butter and jelly on them ok? Hannibal? Would you like more coffee?"

"Thank you Will"

He holds out his cup and saucer and Sargeant Budge intercepts it and passes it to Will, Will smiles at him,

"I get it. Ok. Please, sit. Abi? Croissants? Hannibal, you have to know I'm hoping she says yes"

Hannibal puts down the paper he'd been reading and takes off his reading glasses,

"I'm sorry, croissants? Abigail? Come and help me make a huge amount of mess"

She goes to him and climbs onto his lap as he reaches round her to the table and opens a croissant,

"Butter and jelly, or butter and honey?"

"Can I have both?"

"Frankly that sounds disgusting. Will? Really? Jelly and honey?"

"Blame her mom. Jelly and honey."

Abigail eats her way through three croissants and then lies back against Hannibal's chest before she yawns hugely remembering at the last minute she should put a hand over her mouth.

"Tired?"

"Maybe. Should I have a little nap now so I can get up later?"

"Shall I show you where your bed is?"

Will lazily watches as Hannibal explains to Abigail about the pullout and how the double doors open between their bedroom and the living area so it's almost like one big room. He shows her where the two bathrooms are. And when they come back she looks thoughtful but doesn't say anything.

"Ok Hannibal, your show, plans?"

“This afternoon I'd suggest we're all at leisure? Miriam, Tobias, thank you for all your help. Barring disaster we won't need you again until maybe a little before lunchtime tomorrow, Will what time should Abigail eat? 13:00 hours? Earlier?”

“1pm is fine thanks”

“So, perhaps we might all go out for lunch, then an afternoon of sightseeing, Tobias how do you feel about driving or shall we book a car? I can sense you hesitating. Yes the Peripherique was horrible, let’s get a car and driver with room for all of us please. Miriam will you manage that? Good. We’ll be back for about 17:00, then maybe an hour of downtime. I'd very much like to take Will out to dinner, Abigail, may I borrow your daddy tomorrow evening? If I ask Sargeant Budge and Private Lass to sit with you?”

She nods,

“I think I'll be quite tired then. Can we have a movie?”

“I should think so, Will does that suit you?”

“Yup, works for me. I brought a change of tie”

Hannibal gives him a small look,

“Hmm. That's a good thing?”

“You're going to wear that dress uniform thing aren't you?”

“Not the evening version but yes”

“I'm not even going to ask”

“It has tails”

Abigail perks up,

“Not those kind Abs, it's a kind of coat”

She deflates slightly, Will eyes her,

“Ok, Abs is going to sleep now, lunchtime tomorrow then? In the lobby?”

There are nods, and Sirs and all round agreement.

……..

“His hair was wet”

“The boss looked like a great big smug cat”

“He really did. God I hope this works out. Did you hear about Colonel Brown, Sarge?”

“I think everyone heard about Colonel Brown!”

“What a git. Sorry not appropriate”

“I'll let it slide. You know the Colonel is picking up the tab for the suite?”

“Not just the excess?”

“He didn't want anyone to make a fuss about it?”

“Shit. So he's being careful?”

“Wouldn't you be”

“God. Colonel Brown is a piece of work. What are we going to do this afternoon?”

“I dunno, I hadn't really expected to get this much time?”

“Movie, sights? Meal? Oh hey, what about a revue? You know, like moulin rouge?”

“Wow Lass, you know how to live!”

“I've never been to France. I bet the concierge would help”

“How's your French?”

“Poor? What about yourself?”

“Comme ci, comme ca?”

“Is that it?”

“Pretty much. They'll speak English at the reception”

……

Abigail looks at her daddy and then at Hannibal, and then back again,

“Daddy, can I go to sleep?”

“Sure poppet, do you want to wash your teeth first?”

She nods and then comes closer to him, and asks quietly,

“Will you come and help me?”

He looks at her and raises both eyebrows, she's not looking anxious, but some kind of question, because she can brush her own teeth no problem,

“Of course, where's the toothbrush? In the little bag?”

Abigail retrieves the special bag from the airplane and Hannibal watches her over the top of the paper he's picked up again, he glances at Will and mouths,

“Alright?”

Will gives him a very small nod,

“She's just putting two and two together”

He nods to the bedroom,

“One bed”

Hannibal makes an facial expression of dawning understanding,

“I'm so sorry, was that a mistake?”

“No, really, Miriam, Tobias, one of them did ask about the beds. I know I joked before but I said one was fine if you were ok with it”

“I should have thought though”

“And now you have. Don't worry. She'll come and ask you too in a minute”

Will follows Abigail into one of the bathrooms where she is standing on a small stool and has worked out that C on the tap doesn't mean cold, whereas F does.

“Shall I tell you what the C is?”

With the toothbrush and paste in her mouth she doesn't say anything just looks at him in the mirror of the bathroom above the sink and nods,

“They speak French here, C is the first letter of Chaud which means hot. F is for Froid which means cold. Ok. C for hot and F for cold”

She spits out some paste,

“Or F for freezing? And C for…”

She pauses and frowns,

“I don't know. Daddy?”

“Abigail”

“Will you have enough space in your bed? Hannibal is bigger than you, he might not leave you enough room”

“I think it's ok. Like when you and Lily share a bed at Bev’s and you both wiggle until there's room for both of you.”

“Or you and Buster and Winston?”

Will smiles a little sadly, when Margot was killed all four of them had huddled in his bed, holding onto each other for comfort in the dark.

“Also true. Ok? And we'll have the doors open so you're not on your own”

“That's a good idea. I can tell him if he wiggles too much and keeps you awake”

“You surely can. Though what if it's me that's the wriggler?”

“I'll come and tell you”

“Abs, proper question. Ok? Is this ok? If you're worried we can swop around, we can let Hannibal have the pullout and we can have the big bed?”

“Can I ask him? You said I could ask him things”

“I did. You go ask him, finish here first”

She brushes her teeth some more and then washes her face and hands, Will hands her a small towel.

“Thank you”

“Abi? Don't be nervous, you can ask”

She nods and climbs off the stool, Will watches from the doorway as she goes to stand near Hannibal leaning on him a little,

“Hello there, what can I do for you?”

“Daddy says I can ask you.”

“You may. What would you like to ask?"

“Is it alright if daddy shares your bed? He won't really fit in mine. He'd fit in yours. If you wriggle up”

“Yes, that would be alright. It's a good question. What do you think?”

She leans on him some more,

“I don't think you've kissed him enough yet”

In the doorway Will tries quite hard not to laugh as Abigail strokes Hannibal's nose and slightly rough jaw,

“You could kiss him more and Lily says grown ups like to cuddle. So maybe you should cuddle him too? Though your face is all scratchy. Daddy's beard is all soft. But I expect you know that?”

“You're right, it is soft. It's nice to kiss”

“Good. I'm going to sleep now. You can have a nap as well, if you want to. Lily says grown ups cuddle lying down too.”

……

Abigail is huffing to herself slightly in her sleep. Will looks down at her and smiles.

“Hannibal? I'm going to go and look in the shop downstairs. I'll be back in five minutes. Ok? Is there a key? Or shall I just knock?”

Hannibal looks up at him with mildly raised eyebrows,

“No cuddles? Even with permission?”

“I'll be five minutes. And then a lot of cuddles and kisses. Key?”

Hannibal picks up the paper again and puts his glasses back on,

“On the side, one for you”

Will looks at him as he gets the key,

“You look gorgeous in glasses”

Hannibal raises his eyebrows,

“Really? Glasses?”

“Absolutely! It makes me want to do terrible things to you”

Hannibal smiles,

“Not the uniform then?”

“I don't think so. But the glasses? Definitely. A lot. God. These pants are too tight all of a sudden”

“You mean it?”

“I really do. Look five minutes and then, well, something, ok?”

Hannibal can only nod, glasses?

…….

In the lift going down Will tries hard not to consider the glasses at all. Why hadn't he seen Hannibal wearing them back at home? Maybe he hadn't read anything? Or maybe it's just fine print. Hells teeth. And still with the hello kitty thing. Ok. Cuddles and kisses. How very chaste sounding.

In the lobby he looks around, he hadn’t taken a huge amount of notice when they checked in but just enough to have had an idea. Part of one of the shops is a small jewellers and in the end he spends maybe closer to ten minutes there and comes away looking very pleased with himself. In the stationers and general sweets and tobacconist next door he buys a few other things. Ok. Definitely an idea now.

At the bank of lifts he stands back to let a woman in ahead of him,

“Which floor would you like”

“Seven please. Thank you”

There's the usual pause, do you say anything because there's just two of you in the lift? Or not? He glances at her and is a bit embarrassed to catch her eye and she smiles at him a little. She smiles more widely,

“Are you Will Graham?”

“I am, ok, that's, oh, you've seen pictures you must be Mischa! Fantastic. Ok. You're earlier than I thought!”

“I'm staying overnight. I couldn't face the train or drive later. And I also want to be able to have a drink!”

He laughs,

“Ok, that's not foreboding at all!”

“Oh, no, sorry. God. Not like that. No it'll be fine, I'm sure. Papa is secretly delighted, he's a bug fan, and you've got a daughter? Honestly? And I'm sorry to be so pragmatic and perhaps cynical but that is also a dream win. They never thought they'd get grandchildren!”

“She smiles and then makes a bit of a face,

“Err, sorry about that. It's just taken the pressure off a bit. Sorry. Not appropriate.”

“It's ok. I get it. My dad was the same when we got married and had Abigail. I don't have siblings. It's a big deal for him”

“God, I like you already. Which floor are you on?”

“Nine. Will you come up?”

“Have you had lunch?”

“We had a very late breakfast, Abigail's asleep right now but Hannibal is awake!”

“I'd like that, come with me to my room and then we can go and surprise him together”

Will grins and nods, not quite what he anticipated, but why not? Hello Kitty after all.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 20

Chapter Summary

Second half NSFW (and thank you Mischa!).

Hannibal hears the door go and without looking up from the paper laughs,

“We have different views of time, I'm sure that was closer to half an hour”

“I kidnapped him en route, don't blame Will”

Hannibal puts down the paper,

“Mischa! How lovely, you're earlier than I thought?”

He makes to get up but she makes sit down gestures with her hand, she bends and kisses him instead and sits in the chair opposite,

“You're singing from the same hymn sheet! I wanted to stay overnight. Lazy afternoon, lazy morning. You know?”

“I don't especially. How on earth did you know Will?”

Will walks past him to the teeny kitchen area, and trails a hand across his shoulder, which Hannibal clasps briefly,

“Pure chance, but you must have shown her a picture, Mischa knew me in the lift. I'm going to make more coffee, either of you?”

He starts to open cupboards,

“Mischa we don't have much in the way of lunch materials just some fruit really, can that hold you over?”

“Of course, though it's after 1, aren't you having lunch”

“Out time is a bit out of whack, it's why Abigail's asleep, oh, except she's not, hey, curly girlie come say hello to Mischa”

Abigail yawns again and remembers her hand, and goes to her father first and leans on him,

“Hello”

Mischa smiles at her, she's so like her father and also not in subtle ways. Perhaps a little small for an eight year old, but lovely curly hair, which is definitely from her daddy. And such a sweet smile, oh she's a heart stealer. Mischa has a quick mental assessment, if Abigail is at all smart she will

instantly win over their father, as shall Will, especially if he has any particular knowledge of lepidoptera or silphidae. Their mother? Well, harder to say. Maybe. Murasaki? She's very fond of Hannibal so probably, in fact, as she glances at Hannibal's face, almost certainly as he's clearly telegraphing adoration.

“Abigail, hello, I'm Hannibal's sister Mischa, I'm delighted to meet you, I've only seen pictures, and you can't see how clever or what someone is really like just in pictures”

Abigail nods,

“Yes. It's sad. You can only see the outsides and most of the interesting things are inside”

And that's it, Mischa is won, she looks up at Will,

“Definitely some fruit, and some coffee, and god I love you too”

Will laughs and squeezes his daughter’s shoulder,

“Nice one Abs.”

Abigail doesn't take much persuasion to squeeze into the chair beside Mischa and they eat fruit together. There's a long conversation about hair and what they might do to Abigail's for the evening and whether Mischa should have hers up or down.

“Did you bring anything to wear tonight?”

“I brought my birthday dress that Hannibal gave to me, do you want to see?”

“Very much, please”

Abigail wiggles off the chair and goes to the small armoire where her clothes have either been hung or folded away by Private Lass, she carefully brings the dress on its hanger,

“This is very nice, Hannibal did you get it made? Excellent choice. What about shoes Abigail?”

“These ones. They were for Christmas.”

Hannibal had clearly had some slippers made to match the dress with extra sequins and very small heels, less than half an inch, but enough.

“Oh, perfect. This will do very well. Ok. I think this evening the outside might just match the inside”

“Mommy used to say I was very nice on the inside”

She puts the dress and shoes next to her fold out bed,

“Your mommy was right. I'm surprised though you haven't put more in the inside. Aren't you hungry?”

“Only a little bit, in a funny way. It was a long time on the plane and it's not the same time now”

Mischa glances sharply at Hannibal,

“What time did you arrive my sweet?”

“I think it was morning? Hannibal?”

“They got in at 9am, the Peripherique did a perfect impression of a car park so we were here by what, just before 11”

“Today!?”

She looks to Will,

“You got here this morning?”

“We got three days off school, back in on Wednesday. We're delighted to be here at all! It's ok Mischa, really”

Mischa blinks at him and looks again at Hannibal, she switches to French,

“Hannibal! That's ridiculous, this morning? Have you had any time together?”

“My staff kindly took Abigail for a milkshake and tour of the hotel and a certain amount of running up and down stairs to deal with all the excitement”

“That's lovely of them, but that's not enough.”

“They're having Abigail tomorrow evening, we’ll have dinner and some time then. Mischa don't worry, I wouldn't have it different, Abigail is perfect.”

“I know she is I can see that. But really? You must have time with Will, some proper time. For goodness sake. Why don't we ask, maybe I could have her this afternoon, we can do hair things and I can get her dressed for tonight. Honestly, you're ridiculous, take him to bed or something”

“That's sweet of you Mischa, but they just got here, so did you, for some down time”

“God I can sleep in in the morning, don't be stupid! Or is this some martyr thing”

He eyes her,

“No. Just practical”

“Do you want to?”

“Of course Mischa. It's not lack of desire I promise you”

“Well then? What? You look like you want to eat him alive, and he looks like he'd let you, for goodness sake, Hannibal! The sexual tension in here? You could cut it!”

Will makes a small noise then and the siblings look at him, he smiles innocently,

“You two done?”

Abigail pokes Mischa in the side,

“That was French wasn't it? I don't know French”

And that's a good job thinks Mischa,

“But daddy does. Daddy speaks French with Grandpere”

Mischa looks horrified for a moment and then laughs,

“Oh my god, that's priceless! Will! Why didn't you stop us”

“Oh you know, dinner and a show.”

Hannibal looks rather guilty,

“I'm very sorry. I had no idea”

“And the whole Louisiana thing wasn't a clue, or did you not see the passports, ahh, you didn't did you? Sargeant Budge sorted the flights! Brilliant. I love it”

Will comes to sit on the arm of Hannibal's chair and puts an arm round him,

“She's right, more time, for everything. Abigail, sweets, Mischa is offering to give you a little bite of lunch in a bit and help you do the whole dress up thing for the rest of the family this evening. You might even persuade her to let you have cartoons for a bit of time. What do you think? Would you like that?”

“Can I see her room?”

“You can take your things with you if you like, we could meet just before we go to eat?”

“You wouldn't have to help me do my hair. Daddy does plaits really well. But I like my hair to be a tree”

“A tree?”

Abigail puts her hands standing out from her head,

“Oh, with curls? We can do that”

Will sighs,

“It will take forever to brush tomorrow”

“But I'll be a tree!”

“You're in Mischa’s no doubt capable hands”

“Really Will, alright?”

“Yeah. Just don't leave the hotel with her she'll run riot if she's a tree”

“Daddy used to say I was like an Ent. He read me The Lord of the Rings last year, but he said the films are too scarey. Mommy had it on a tape, I listen to it sometimes. I'm a hasty Ent”

Mischa looks beyond impressed,

“Lets put your things together Miss Quickbeam and we shall eat some lunch, we could get room service do you know what that is?”

They keep up a running commentary as the two of them gather things that Abigail might need either that afternoon or evening. Mischa is faintly amused to note that the background sexual tension has maybe ratcheted up a notch or two by the time they're done.

“Very well, 5:30 in the lobby, yes?”

“Thank you Mischa, good bye Abigail, see you later”

When the door closes Will just about manages to laugh,

“I love your sister too!”

……..

“Keep your glasses on for a little bit? Please”

“Of course, take yours off?”

“That's convenient”

“It is. Will you tell me about any pictures?”

“I can, but they're still packed, I'll give them to you tomorrow”

“Thankyou. So. Here or bedroom?”

“Bedroom for sure, it’s bigger than the one at home. Hannibal, I realised, I don't even know if you have a house or apartment somewhere, for when you're not on tour or something?”

“As it happens I do, two actually, one here in Paris though that's let long term, and one in Baltimore. I trained at John's Hopkins.”

“Trained? As what?”

“I was a doctor, surgeon actually, before I joined the army”

“You're kidding me”

“Not at all? Why? Doctors not your thing?”

“What? Oh no, not that, but you were just down the road. Do you use the Baltimore place?”

“Sometimes, mostly it’s let, usually visiting professors. I'm there sometimes. It's convenient for DC without being DC. And for the Pentagon of course”

“I worked at the Smithsonian for a few years. I had a place near the Potomac.”

“So, you were very close then”

“Come to bed with me?”

“With pleasure”

…….

On the bed Will stretches his back and puts one hand behind his head,

“I realised something when I was drawing, can I tell you?”

Hannibal lifts his head from where he is kissing Will down the side of his chest,

“Of course, I want you to”

“Good. I realised that a lot of what I wanted to draw in terms of what I want is rather, well, anal. I like anal sex. I kept thinking about you fucking me. The last few weeks. When you used your hands, your fingers? Fantastic. You inside me. I remember you coming inside me. I can't tell you how erotic that was for me.”

He makes a small arching movement and Hannibal lays a hand on his stomach,

“Yes? What else? Do you like to have more than fingers?”

“I don't know. I never used anything, toys or anything, but I loved the feel of your fingers inside me, maybe your mouth? I know that's not everyone's thing. But I like the idea of it”

“Being eaten out?”

“Yeah. I guess. It's ok if it's not your thing. It's really about the penetration. And oral, I liked sucking you so much, but you fucking me afterwards was beyond incredible. I wanted to say, because of two of the pictures”

“Describe them to me?”

“Ok, I don't want to horrify you!”

“Will, my darling, tell me, please. It's arousing for me to know what you want, what excites you too”

“Ok. One of them, and don't forget they're tiny so the detail isn't great”

“Will, listen, don't be embarrassed. Desire is an amazing thing. If we find compatibilities that will be wonderful. If there's something that doesn't excite one of us, there will be plenty of other things that do, tell me”

“Alright. Yeah. You're right. Ok. One of them you're sucking me, I'm lying pretty much like this, on the bed, with my legs sort of raised slightly at the knee and quite wide apart, but relaxed. So, you're just using your mouth on me, but you're using your fingers on me at the same time, and your other hand? I'm sucking your fingers. I kept thinking about it. That's what we did before you fucked me, but from behind this time. That's one of the other pictures, you fucking me from behind, on my knees but resting my head on my arms. Pushing in, and holding my hips, it's a bit rawer than the one last time where we’re face to face. It's not less tender, it's just rawer. You fuck me like that and you come in me. I think you reach around me to jerk me off too, or maybe I come from the friction of the sheets, or probably the prostate stimulation. God. If you were a medic I bet you know where everything is, right?”

“I do. Yes.”

“Fantastic! Is that ok?”

“My love, I enjoy anal sex very much too. And penetration. Fingering you open was impossibly good, I like to watch as well. We can move the mirror in here tomorrow night. Would that be alright?”

Will makes the small involuntary arch movement again,

“Yeah. I would. God. Definitely. What else? What else do you like, tell me too”

“I think I'd describe myself as quite oral, so the idea of eating you out is highly erotic. At the same time perhaps as using my fingers on you, or jerking you off. Maybe you should draw that for me too?”

Will nods rather urgently,

“Fuck. Yeah. Damn”

“I admit I have also succumbed to the idea of leaning you up against things and entering you. Maybe the shower? We could combine rimming and me fucking you like that. Under the spray of water? Ideally we’ll find a warm waterfall sometime. I'd like that outdoors very much.”

“I'm not really very exhibitionist”

“I mis-spoke, nor am I, and I certainly wouldn't share you that way. Our own private waterfall.”

Will smiles,

“Ok. Private waterfall. Or shower if we're going with the poor man’s version. What else? I think you enjoyed me blowing you?”

“Very much, like I said, oral, even if it's you giving, there's something inflaming about watching you swallow around me. But I prefer to finish in you”

“Works for me. What else oral? Are you a biter?”

“Not to date. Certainly a kisser, and I'll probably leave some suck bruises on you? Would that be alright?”

“If you do that while you fuck me, every time I look in a mirror over my shoulder it will remind me. God. You better. And sorry, but below the collar line. I know you're possessive, don't look like that. You are. I want you to be. I want to be possessed. Got it? I want that. But the team won't ever leave it alone if I start turning up with giant hickies or a new trend in scarves or what are they? Cravats?”

“Or ascots. Fair enough. Maybe I should get you tattooed instead”

“Return to Colonel H Lecter Gone AWOL?”

Hannibal smiles and nods,

“Is that all three? No only two? What's the third?”

“It's like this really, one of us lying supine, hand behind a head, the other lying propped up on an elbow, with one hand resting on the other’s side, stroking, looking at each other. Just before they lean down to kiss. You can see it, we've been talking but that's about to change”

“Like this?”

Like that.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 21

In the lobby Sargeant Budge sits and waits for Private Lass. The plan is they'll go for a walk around, see a few things, and then go to a revue a little later. They didn't get tickets for the Moulin Rouge mainly because they were horrified by the prices when they saw the exchange rate for dollars into euros.

As he looks around, really just people watching, he sees an older man approach the desk, idly he thinks the guy looks faintly like his boss, same cheekbones mainly and he looks somehow European. Yeah ok, so they're in France, big clue! He listens to the guy speak with the receptionist. They seem to have a bit of to and fro and perhaps some disagreement.

The older man looks at his watch once or twice, then pulls out his wallet. Initially he thinks the guy is going to try a bribe but then the receptionist laughs when the man shows him something inside. Oh thinks Sargeant Budge, maybe a photo? He sees Miriam across the lobby and raises a casual hand to her in greeting. He hears a bit more of the exchange and is instantly on the alert,

“What's that look for?”

“I think that's the boss’s dad. Over there by the reception. Shit. What's the time? We should let them know he's come here. They're supposed to meet at the restaurant.”

“You ring upstairs, I'll go and ask him, maybe play for time a little?”

She doesn't wait for an answer but heads for the desk, watching her, Tobias pulls out his cell and phones the Colonel’s number. It isn't him who answers, but they do answer in French,

“Dr Graham? Hi, I didn't know you spoke French, it's Tobias Budge”

“Tobias? Hey, are you alright? And yeah, no one expects me to speak French, but there we are.”

“Colonel Lecter’s father is here in reception, I don't think the concierge gave him the suite number, I'm not sure. Miriam is running delaying tactics, I'm going to go and help. We can buy you maybe five to ten minutes. More if I can stall the lift”

“Hannibal's father? Oh that's just peachy! Hannibal?”

Tobias hears a rumble at the other end in the background,

“Your father is on his way up”

Rumble rumble,

“No. It's Sargeant Budge. Like an early warning system. God, this day.”

He switches back to talking to Sargeant Budge,

“Thank you so much. That's above and beyond the call of duty really, I'd offer you Abigail as a thank you in exchange, but you've met her. I better go. And thanks. And have a nice evening. See you tomorrow. If we survive.”

As he hangs up Tobias hears him laugh,

“Hannibal! You idiot!…”

Then he's gone. Ok, he didn't sound too annoyed. Tobias looks back at Miriam and walks towards the old man and her.

“Sir! Are you our Colonel’s father? Excellent. Can I just say it's a privilege to work for him. Has Private Lass introduced herself? I'm the Colonel’s Sargeant at Arms, Tobias Budge, Sir”

“Yes? Good. They were reluctant to tell me which suite. But you can show me, yes? I even showed the man a picture!”

Tobias smiles,

“I guess they're pretty careful Sir”

“Oh? Oh, yes, I expect so. Come along then, show me the way. And thank you. You're very helpful. Private Lass ehh? Good work there, what are you? Enlisted?”

“First Class Sir”

“Good, Hannibal treat you alright too?”

“Excellent Sir. He's a proper soldier sir.”

The Count smiles. Good.

……..

Will ties the knot in his tie and puts his best game face on when he goes to the door,

“Hello Miriam, oh, Tobias too, everything alright?”

“Dr Graham, I have the Colonel’s father here. Also Colonel Lecter, or I think Count Lecter. Sir”

Tobias salutes and Hannibal's father smiles faintly at him,

“Thank you Sargeant. Good. I hope the rest of your evening is very pleasant. You too Private.”

The Sargeant and Private Lass give Will a look of conspiratorial support over the Count’s shoulder, Will smiles at them and carefully stands aside to let him in and close the door,

“Hannibal should be here in a moment. He was just getting changed for dinner. You'll have guessed I'm Will Graham, I'm pleased to meet you sir”

“You too William. Hannibal has spoken of you very fondly, we’re very glad you could come this weekend. I understand your daughter is here too?”

“Come and have a seat whilst we wait, please”

He indicates one of the chairs and the old man sits, nodding thanks at Will,

“She is here, actually she's with your daughter”

“Mischa? When did she get here?”

“At about lunch time, she'd intended to have a rest this afternoon instead she and Abigail decided to do something, that I can best describe as frilly”

The Count laughs,

“Frilly? Very good. Now I understand from my wife that you’re an insect man”

“That's right sir, FBI, forensic entomology. Though my PhD was in Carrion beetle specifically”

The Count perks up instantly,

“Really? They're a passion of mine, the whole silphidae family, how interesting. Wait, you’re not the Graham who wrote the standard monograph on time of death by insect activity?”

“As it happens I am. Though I’ve updated some of the work since”

“Really? What specifically?”

“I've been looking at the impact of VOCs in the environment on time variables”

“Situated analysis then”

“Exactly so”

“Oh that's fascinating. I've several things I'd like to ask you about if you're willing?”

“Of course, what's your particular interest?”

“Oh, parental habits, you know the thing. I'm surprised you're not older”

“Because?”

“The monograph is excellent, very detailed analysis, I've the French and Italian versions as well as the English”

“Oh yes, I know the.., Hannibal, hello, your father and I are taking about the family silphidae”

“Hannibal, why didn't you tell me he was the author of the insect thing I go on about?”

Hannibal raises his eyebrows,

“What? That time of death paper? Will, that's not you is it?”

“100% all my own work. That and the updates. Though I've got a junior working on larval digestion right now to update a section. She'll get a credit in the next edition”

Hannibal's father beams at Will,

“Excellent, we shall have a chance for some very interesting conversations. Hannibal don't look so worried I won't monopolise him over dinner. But later for sure. I must make some notes. Could I send you a few rough things I have, by email, have you a card or the like?”

“I do, I'll get you one”

He gets up to go back to the bedroom to find his wallet still on the bedside table and pulls out a work card from inside. On the way back he catches the look on Hannibal's face which seems to be battling between smugness, pride and amusement. Will thinks smug might be winning.

“Sir, here you are. I'll be back after Wednesday, email always reaches me unless there's an out of office ping back. I'd be glad to talk bugs endlessly. Abigail gets very bored, though she claims to love certain Lepidoptera. You'll get to meet her very soon, we're meeting in the lobby in ten minutes or so. Hannibal are you ready. If so I'm going to go finish off in the bathroom. Ok? Sir, I'll be a few minutes”

As he goes he makes a face at Hannibal who smiles back with much delight,

“Hannibal, he's an excellent fellow. And your mother will love the curls. He's very pretty”

Will rolls his eyes and closes the bathroom door. Hannibal has wondered since his teens if his father might be less strictly heterosexual than the family seem to have generally assumed, certainly he's had some very close male friends over the years, though, well, he's never seemed to stray,

“He is papa, he's beautiful”

“Making you happy?”

“Exceptionally”

“Good, I'm glad about that. Though Simonetta carries reports from Iris that have worried her. But I imagine she'll ask you herself.”

“This isn't about Matthew is it?”

“I'm afraid it is. Your mother says you didn't punch him!”

“It's true. I didn't. And I think that's regarded as being more remarkable than if I had!”

“At least he's not your superior”

“If I hit him I'd be done papa. I have no intention of making his mistakes too. I already made the bigger one”

“Does William know?”

“You can call him Wil, and yes, he knows, Matthew came to his workplace.”

“To the FBI place? Oh that's very poorly done. Man should know when he's beaten by the better fellow”

“Wills not the opposition papa, that's just what Matthew wants everyone to believe. There is no battle or fight or opposition or game, except in Matthew's mind perhaps. As far as I am concerned there is only Will. And amazingly that comes with Abigail who I think you will like.”

“Like her father?”

“And I'm sure some like her mother, and uniquely herself”

The Count smiles,

“Perfect. Simonetta said about her mother, how is the child with that?”

“We don't ignore Margot in conversation, nor so far have I noted particular avoidance on her part but she's eight, and her mother was killed when she was almost five. That's a difficult time to understand those sorts of changes”

“So they've been alone for three years. That must have been very hard.”

“Terrible I think. I've met some of Will’s friends. They're a loyal and devoted crew. Will? We're just talking about your colleagues”

“Team Sassy Science?”

Hannibal's father smiles a question,

“The three of them went to do a series of roadshows in schools in the area they called it ‘Team Sassy Science’, they were very funny. Ask Abigail, she saw one. She's close to most of my colleagues, Beverly in particular, you'll hear a lot about her, and her niece Lily. A lot. And sir, please I beg of you don't mention either Hello Kitty or Godzilla”

“The Japanese monster? Really? Murusaki has an original poster. She was quite a fan.”

Will laughs,

“Forget I said anything, if your sister in law is up for a conversation about Godzilla Abigail will love that”

Hannibal smiles,

“I think we should go, papa, everything you need? Will my love?”

“Yeah, I'm good, thank you. Oh one sec.”

He disappears back into the bedroom, and Count Lecter leans in and whispers to his son,

“One bed eh? I shan't tell your mother”

Hannibal feels about sixteen again, caught fooling around with a neighbour’s slightly older boy, and is perhaps slightly embarrassed as he blushes, when Will comes back he looks at Hannibal with a querying expression but Hannibal just shakes his head. Maybe not that particular conversation right this moment. Though his father had been very laid back about it if Hannibal remembers rightly it was his mother who had hit the roof.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 22

Chapter Summary

Matthew Brown? Still an asshat.

Mischa Lecter? Our new girl-crush

Hannibal Lecter? Hot damn

And Abigail Graham? A total tree

Will eats the last few mouthfuls of his main course, Abigail is managing her filled pasta and so far hasn't done anything to disrupt the notion that she is an angel sent from heaven to grace all their lives. Will gives it until jet lag hits. He's just beginning to feel it. He hopes she won't succumb until at least the end of dessert.

He's also struggling with the whole hands thing. How had he not known about hands? Ok maybe that's to do with the synesthesia and how he's careful about touch. But really? How could he not know? He tries to be casual about it as he watches Hannibal simply use his knife and fork, and just plain eat, and then wipe his mouth on a napkin. Will would quite like to be that napkin right now. Especially when Hannibal casually lays it back down in his lap and smooths it in place.

And, well, Will knows he should wake up a bit more or he's going to do something embarrassing or make some kind of very obvious noise. A moan for example. Quite loud. He has a second of horror when he hopes and prays that he only thought about that. He glances round, no one looking shocked. Probably good then. Hannibal catches his eye,

“Will? Are you alright. Is it the jet-lag?”

Oh yeah, thinks Will, definitely the jet-lag and not the hope that your adored lover and fuck off gorgeous partner isn't just sitting there with hands like he has no idea what an offensive weapon they are and what they might do. Tearing down the barricades Will hadn't even noticed he'd built until he and Abigail were safely enclosed within. Safely and maybe a little sadly.

“It might be. I'm just feeling a bit dislocated”

Simonetta smiles,

“Well, it was a long way to come for a weekend”

Will smiles back, he's already dead certain how he's going to play her,

“But worth it. For both of us to meet you all. Hard to gainsay the opportunity. What do you think Abs, long flight but perfect arrival?”

Abigail looks at her daddy and at the waiting grown ups.

“It's nice when people love you and you love them right back. I don't mind the plane. And I can always have a lie in tomorrow. I think. Can I daddy?”

“Totally. You can sleep all day if you like.”

“It's like that now and this is the best dream”

Hannibal asks her,

“Abigail, are you tired? We could ask the waiter for a pillow if you'd like? Or a blanket?”

The restaurant is one of those rare places that when they say they welcome children they actually mean it. Her chair is raised to the right height, has proper arms and slight wings to the back so if she falls asleep she can. The back reclines slightly too. Perfect for curling up in and snoozing. Will envies her.

“I'm alright. A bit woozy, but that's the leaves. Aunty Mischa says I'm a big sap”

She smiles and Will eyes Mischa, ‘aunty’ is it now? Mischa smiles smugly back at him. And Will is suddenly reminded very strongly of Bev. Oh god. Two of them.

“Why does ‘aunty’ Mischa say you're a big sap, because you're a tree?”

“Because we watched some of Nemo and I was worried”

“But you know how Nemo ends, right?”

“I was worried it might change”

Will smiles at her, still uncertain then. Ok.

“I get it Abs. It's alright, they still find Nemo. Murasaki, I'm told you're a Godzilla fan, Abigail is too”

Abigail turns to her and asks,

“You don't believe in Godzuky do you? I'm very sorry. He's just made up”

There's a strong and fierce conversation about studio Toho and then other Japanese animations. Abigail holds her own until she yawns hugely,

“Hannibal, please can you take me to the rest room?”

Will looks at her, ok, she wants to ask him something, so he watches as Hannibal lifts her out of the chair and they walk towards the rear of the restaurant. Mischa watches Will watching,

“I think she's alright. She did get worried about Nemo though. Sorry.”

“It's ok. She struggles a bit with uncertainty around people getting lost. The films both good and bad, on the one hand Nemo gets found, and that's a happy result. But on the other hand it's a reminder that if you don't get found it's unhappy. Or that you've done something very wrong.”

“She thinks she did something wrong?”

“Still.”

Murasaki interrupts,

“This is about your wife Will? I'm sorry it must be very difficult. She's amazingly composed.”

“It's been three years. She's making progress. Hannibal is very good for her. She can see that it's not always certain or easy and that it's dangerous sometimes but he comes back. But she also gets that if he can't or doesn't it's not because of her. It helps her. It's not her fault if he can't.”

“They obviously get on”

“Oh, I think both Mischa and Hannibal were pretty much instant wins”

Murasaki laughs then,

“And us?”

She gestures round the three older Lecter family members, Will smiles at her,

“Ask me again tomorrow she'll have made a decision by then”

Simonetta smiles faintly,

“How worrisome to be judged so promptly”

Will smiles at her, he does have some sympathy, but not if he's going to be on the receiving end of any annoyance she might have either about the mess with Matthew Brown or about her son’s sexuality.

“I guess it might be”

The waiter comes over then to speak to him and he's drawn into that, the other four have a conversation without him which is frankly a welcome break, definitely the jet lag he thinks, he focuses on what the waiter is saying,

“Oh, I see, Mischa, I'm so sorry to interrupt, could you possibly go and help Abigail, the Ladies rest room is sufficiently opulent she's a bit intimidated?”

Mischa laughs and gets up,

“Of course Will, us aunts must pull our weight”

He laughs and idly listens to the conversation that has carried on between Murasaki the Count and Simonetta, in French, as that's how they converse usually. Not being rude, just normal and slightly unthinking. He doesn't interrupt. The Count suddenly stops,

“Will, I'm so sorry, that was rude. Habit I'm afraid. Hannibal? Is Abigail alright?”

“She's fine, just the grandeur. Apparently there are two chandeliers. What did I miss”

Will smiles at him,

“Your parents and aunt were just deciding that Abigail is indeed a princess, I'm pretty good overall, and well done by the way, and Matthew Brown is an even bigger shit than I think you told me”

There's a pause and Murasaki begins to laugh,

“Oh my, you're a French speaker? Oh that's precious. Oh well done. That's very funny”

Hannibal moans slightly and puts his head in his hands, Mischa arrives back at the table, Abigail goes to Hannibal and puts her arms round him,

“What's the matter, why are you upset? Hannibal?”

“He's fine Abigail. Honestly, Hannibal, over to you”

Will is just laughing now,

“I am so lucky to fully understand where I get so many if my own foibles from. Mischa darling, our parents were having a lovely conversation about the newest additions to our family and about Matthew”

Mischa groans,

“Please tell me not in French? Oh. Papa! Really!”

“Oh don't let your children berate you Sir, suffice to say the apple doesn't fall so far from the tree after all. They were caught on this particular hook earlier. I'm Louisianan originally and did French as a minor at college. Both my parents are Creole and French speakers. If you'd gone for Japanese though? I know about six sentences and one of them is ‘the Sakura are very beautiful in the moonlight.”

“We agree on so much already Will. I am sorry though. It was rude. But I am worried about Matthew”

Abigail looks at Hannibal,

“Is that Mr Colonel?”

“It is, but he's not ever someone you need to worry about”

“He doesn't worry me it's ok. Miss Bloom told him he was very silly”

All the adults look at her, Will blinks,

“Abigail? We won't talk about this right now, and you're not in trouble so don't worry ok? I'm going to ask you about Miss Bloom later on, ok?”

She nods,

“I think I was supposed to tell you, I forgot. Is it alright daddy? I'm sorry”

“It is utterly alright. You don't need to worry at all. You my darling are brilliant. Colonel Brown is a twig. You are a tree.”

“He probably wishes he was a tree. Aunty Mischa? Can I have that cherry if you're not going to?”

Abigail and Mischa talk about fruit garnishes on food, Mischa distracting Abigail from the looks going round the table, Will switches into French,

“Hannibal my love, obviously I know the right people for this, but if he comes near Abigail, he'll wish to hell he hadn't. I'm only partly joking.”

Hannibal's father looks between them both, he feels the same protectiveness too towards Mischa and Hannibal,

“Will, we shan't have it. Simonetta will speak to Iris or Matthew directly. I know his senior officer in Washington. If required Hannibal will make an official complaint. We can all manage I'm sure, but not Abigail. I’m very disappointed in him”

Will wonders about explaining that really psychopaths don't give a shit about your disappointment, but they're all just beginning to get a handle on this, and this is what closing ranks looks like. So. Well. He and Abigail are on the inside of this, so, he'll take it.

“Thank you. I appreciate it”

Simonetta reaches across the table and takes his hand, Will recognises it as an olive branch of sorts,

“We look after our family Will, you're family. You and Abigail”

Will nods at her and squeezes her hand back, perhaps even a little moved by it, fuck you Colonel you can go fuck yourself Brown. Oh and maybe, thanks for fighting that battle for him.

……

In the taxi Will sits beside Hannibal with Abigail on his lap and Mischa squeezed in so the three adults are in a row. Hannibal and Will and Abigail hold hands together and Mischa holds Abigail's other hand. Really Hannibal would quite like to reassure Will and maybe hold him. The three adults don't say very much and Abigail is tired enough not to really notice or worry.

“They were nice to us weren't they daddy”

“They were sweetheart”

“Did they like us enough?”

“I'm sure they did”

“Can I have hot chocolate before I go to bed?”

“I don't think we've got any”

“I've got some, she can have a quick cup with me and then I can bring all of her stuff down to your room. How would that be”

“You’re my new favourite person Mischa, thank you. Abigail ok, you're going to get your things from Mischa’s room and have a hot chocolate and then come back to me and Hannibal, ok? In our room?”

Abigail nods and hums, definite result, Aunty Mischa and hot chocolate!

…….

In the hotel suite Will pulls Hannibal close to him,

“She's given us maybe ten minutes. Tell me you can use that well, because I'd like Matthew Brown erased from my brain and you firmly everywhere. Ok? We've probably got time because I used my three minutes in the restaurant rest room before we left wisely. Ok?”

He pulls their pump of lube from the pocket of his jacket and pushes it into the drawer of his nightstand.

“Hannibal? Will you? Please? And I know normally I, we, just like tender and sweet and passion but right now I just want you to completely stop me worrying”

“My Will”

Hannibal hesitates a moment,

“Will? Don't let him dominate how we are together?”

Will slumps against him,

“Fuck. You're right, I'm so angry with him. God. Not you. I'd be punishing both of us. Damn. Ok. God. Ok. She bought us ten minutes. Just, kiss me, and let's just..”

Hannibal pulls him closer and slowly takes off Will’s jacket, and then tie. He makes a start on Will’s shirt buttons whilst Will takes deeper breaths, and then swallows and begins to undo Hannibal's uniform fastenings,

“Sorry. Fuck. Ok. That's better. Ok. I spent a good fifteen minutes fantasising about your hands over dinner”

“Good. I think I have good hands”

“You have amazing hands”

“We’ll make good use of them, quietly, tonight. Abigail gave us permission for kisses and cuddles”

“She did. Good. We can practice being normal and quiet like at home when we do simply have a Godzilla next door.”

“And we’re not trying to wake the neighbourhood?”

“I love you”

“That's fortunate. If I go to jail for murdering Matthew you and Abigail can come and visit. I think Maryland allows conjugal and family visits.”

“You're so reassuring. Oh. That's nice. More of that please”

There's a knock at the outer door,

“That's the door. A good ten minutes, I think? Yes?”

Will nods,

“The best. I can't believe I wasted three minutes in that bathroom. Owww. I was too fast”

“Oh my darling, maybe you need a nice hot drink as well, or something stronger, I promise I'll kiss it better,

He ghosts a wink at Will as he opens the door,

“..and hello Abigail, bed time? Teeth and so on? Mischa? A drink with us? Not hot chocolate?”

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 23

Chapter Notes

Hurt/comfort...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I like the tower, though it doesn't really look like one”

“What do you think it looks like Abigail?”

“I don't know. Daddy has a building set with bits of metal and things. Maybe like that?”

“She means meccano. I don't know if they even make that any more. I've got some left from when I was a kid”

Mischa takes Abigail's hand, in the end she's hung around long enough to come both to lunch and to do the afternoon tourist bit. She and Miriam Lass have bonded, partly over Abigail, and Tobias Budge seems to regard her with a mixture of either awe or trepidation. Maybe both. Mischa though is smart about it, she knows they're in a difficult situation so she doesn't push it. The boss’s sister? That's a possibly challenging territory to navigate. And she knows she can be a bit much. She feels it right now, simmering.

She's just slightly worried about Will. He looks tired and despite the success of the evening she wonders what's not ok with him. Hannibal seems alright, though also seems to realise that something's not quite right. God. And they leave tomorrow. Mischa’s heart aches just a little.

“Hannibal, come and take some pictures with Abigail for this newsletter thing, Abigail try not to look as though you don't wish you'd got someone else entirely as your solider”

Abigail answers indignantly,

“But I love Hannibal!”

“Ok, try and look like that then. Miriam have you got the camera. Come on guys. Let's all earn their trip”

She's bossy for a few minutes and then pushes Sargeant Budge into being creative director and goes to sit next to Will on the bench he's chosen.

“I'm exhausted. And I imagine you might be more so. Hannibal told me about the synesthesia or I'd have hugged you stupid. God, can I just say, I think you're fantastic Will”

He makes a small noise and she looks at him and realises he might be crying,

“Shit. I'm really sorry, what did I say? Quick they haven't seen, come for a walk with me”

Will gets up and surprises himself by tucking Mischa's hand into the crook of his elbow. He scrambles in his pockets with his other hand until he finds a scrap of tissue, dries the tear tracks. They walk in the opposite direction from the group,

“Sorry Mischa. You're very like my friend Bev at home, I'm kind of treating you as a surrogate”

“Don't hold back. It's ok, is this ok, not too much”

He cries a bit harder for a moment,

“Sorry, that's exactly what she says”

“Are you homesick? Is that what this is?”

“I think just very tired and stupidly anxious and afraid”

“Afraid? Of Matthew?”

“Of losing this, not being good enough”

Mischa thinks of Abigail and her fears of loss, of course Will could feel some of the same things, even without the added complication of Matthew.

“I'm not fantastic. I'm deeply screwed up. And probably not relationship material. Not in the long term.”

“Oh stop it. Tough love first then I'll be soppy ok? I don't know which you need, right?”

“Both. Probably. Ok. What you got for me?”

“First, Hannibal, ok, my brother, who I love so much I think it'll kill me any time I see their goddam drama on the news cycle. Right? Hannibal was gradually growing so miserable and lonely and empty I was terrified he'd do something irrevocably irresponsibly brave because he could and because he was in the right place, and Matthew looked like a good thing, ok, not the fraternising with a junior, but the rest. Because it gave Hannibal hope. And when it became clear that wasn't the story at all I'd say it nearly killed Hannibal. He has so much love and Matthew fucking warped it. So, I've gotta say if you decide to be all fucking noble and ditch him, I might kill you. Ok? Oh my god. Have you seen what despair looks like? Of course you have. In the fucking mirror. Is that what Hannibal looks like when you look at him? Fuck off. God Will. You're saving my life here. Not just Hannibal's. Got it? Really?”

Will mostly nods,

“Ok, I got it, I think. Right. And the sympathy bit, because I'd like to hear that too,”

He sounds a little better as he says it, but still, Mischa strokes his arm and then thinks what the fuck and pulls him into a hug. He doesn't resist but she thinks he's not really with the programme until he takes a breath and relaxes and hugs her back,

“Ok, really, tell me the rest”

“I'm going to talk with Hannibal about getting posted back to the States. It won't happen straight away but when you up and get the chance at love you damn well take it. And yes, I sound like some

dreadful rom-com. I don't honestly care. He loves you Will. Even I can see that, and frankly I'm a little bit jealous. And you too, you're allowed to be happy. You probably have some weird thing going where you think you don't. But do it for Abigail. Let love win, not the fear. Please? Let her have that whole healthy thing? And shuttup I know love doesn't solve everything. I know this will continue to be challenging. For gods sake, you're not teenagers, and that sweet hell. But for fuck's sake"

"This was the sympathy bit?"

"Lovely Will it is, it is sympathy. I blew it you see. I didn't let love. I fucked up so badly I didn't even tell Hannibal. I can't. So don't ask me to. But, hot chocolate for your daughter so you can either have a breathless sex or I don't know meaningful conversation one to one.."

She's about to go on when he laughingly interrupts,

"Normally I'd deflect at this point Mischa, because of the fear. But actually you hit the nail on the head. I tried that. I was so angry, I nearly fucked Hannibal angry. That's a terrible thing to do."

"But you didn't?"

"He called me on it."

"Perfect then. He was the unexpected voice of sanity. Because I expect it was hot! And please no more information, but it'd have killed him to say no. He's a passionate, carnal, physical man. He likes bodies. He likes yours. For fucks sake. Tell me I'm doing better?"

"I'll take it. I am a bit of a mess. But I do ok if people talk me through it. Sorry. I'm doing the whole roller coaster of emotions right now. "

"But it's not out of half heartedness or because you're worried to let Abigail down because she likes him?"

He shakes his head,

"No Mischa. Shall I tell you what I've got him for his birthday?"

"His birthday? Oh. Oh for fuck's sake. It's. God. Is it? Oh my god I'll kill him, it's today isn't it? We don't normally celebrate them. God he must have really wanted to change things."

"How do you mean?"

"Start different with you. Make things have meaning. Oh god. Oh"

He silently hands her the already waterlogged hankie and they both stand there for a minute or so getting a handle on themselves, their fractures, the bits that can't fit anymore, because there are gaps. Leaking life and love and possibility.

"Ok. I won't say anything. As he hasn't. But, tell me. What?"

"I won't show you what's inside, the really personal bit, that's just for Hannibal, no Mischa don't look so terrified I'm not proposing, I'm not, well, that's not it, though your face if I had been, I haven't wrapped it yet,"

She looks at him, a tiny laugh erupting from somewhere inside,

“I take it back. You're very cruel. Alright what is it?”

He hands her a small flat velvet box which she opens, inside is a slim silver box maybe for business cards or credit cards. It's engraved, very small, to fit,

“'In quella parte del libro de la mia memoria.. si trova una rubrica la quale dice: incipit vita nova' Sounds pretty. What does it mean?”

“It's Dante, ‘in the book which is my memory, on the first page of the chapter that is the day when I first met you appear the words 'here begins a new life'"

She breathes hard,

“Will Graham, you bastard, you lied to me!”

“What do you mean? I haven't honestly, it's true, I prom..."

“No, you misunderstand. It is a proposal. Oh Will. That's just lovely. Thank you so much. He'll love it. I'd kiss you but I have a feeling I might have already done too much touching and hugging”

“Not Anthony then?”

“God! No. Piss off, come on, even I know Hannibal is quite possessive, he's been giving us looks for a few minutes. Come on. Both of us dry? Ok. Good.”

“Thank you Mischa”

“I think we both know that goes both ways.”

……..

“Are you alright? Did Mischa say anything to upset you?”

“She didn't. She was very kind. I'm a bit overwrought and she was a very helpful reality check. We've both done well out of this. I got Mischa and you got Abigail.”

“And that's a balanced exchange?”

“You're right I still owe you. Ok. So these photos? Some of Mischa too if she's up for it. And maybe all four of us? And all six if we can get someone else to take them. Your staff are great. Come on. I'll try not to look like I want to sit in your lap and lick you”

Hannibal smiles and holds out a hand,

“You can try.”

Will kisses him, and if Mischa just happens to take a photograph right then that's her business alone. And isn't for any newsletter. Just for the next time either of them get insecure or anxious or afraid. Especially afraid. Of themselves.

Dante? She thinks to herself, if he hadn't already got Hannibal eating out of his hand this would do it. Faintly she wonders what the personal bit of the gift is if the holder wasn't it. Damn, Will. Truly outstanding. If Matthew thinks it's a fight or a race or something he is outclassed before he's even gotten out of the stocks. And that's a fine mix of metaphors.

……

Chapter End Notes

If you want to share on tumblr and Twitter go for it. That'd be smashing. If you already have, thank you. Someone has offered some art, which is a lovely idea. And someone has asked if I could ask if anyone will do something about how Molly and Bev got together. I'm intrigued too? Does Willy/Wally exist here?

If you're still rocking up and reading or commenting, you are amazing. Thank you. If you quite like my writing there's 90 (update: 130) other fics to read. Some of them are great, some of them are a bit Matthew Brown.

Adopt A Soldier AU - Part 24

"Do I need a tie?"

Hannibal leans on the door of their bathroom, his uniform collar undone,

“Not necessarily. They won't insist. I'd rather you were comfortable. I'm hoping for dancing later.”

“Are you? Dancing? Ok. That went well last time if I remember”

Hannibal smiles, since Will and Mischa had had what looked to be a very intense conversation earlier he seems to be much lighter in spirit. Hannibal had decided not to ask Mischa the detail, when she'd been getting ready to leave in the afternoon she'd started out by simply saying,

“He's ok, everything's ok. We should talk about how you're going to get a transfer Hannibal. I'm not sure Papa knows anyone useful now, but he might know someone who knows someone.”

“Thank you Mischa, it would be helpful to talk it through”

“And thank you for not arguing”

“I know you're right. I find it almost intolerable that they're leaving tomorrow to go west and we're leaving in three days time to go east. It's gone better than I had a right to hope for. I should have thought through the family thing more”

She'd stopped packing her bag then and looked at him, she patted the bed and he moved off the window ledge where he was perched and came and sat down,

“Actually it may have worked out ok, it's all in the open, mother had her face slapped pretty effectively. Did Aunt say what Will said about making snap judgements?”

“She did. She certainly likes them both. And so does papa”

“And mother has already texted me today to say she will be speaking to Iris this week. I think she was shocked that Matthew went to Abigail's school. Did Will get more out of her about it”

“He went, ostensibly to offer to talk about the program, Miss Bloom, Abigail’s teacher asked one too many sensible questions about his own adopter.”

“But he's not involved!?”

“That became apparent very quickly, she said it was kind of him to offer but a bit silly when there were so many children in her class who actually had a solider they'd either met or talked to by Skype. Abigail happened to be waiting to be collected in the hallway when they left the classroom. When Miss Bloom came back Abigail asked her about it. I think Will plans to speak to her once he's home.”

“You know Papa will speak to the General, if you want him to. Do you want him to?”

“One more incident of any kind and I'm going to make a complaint. I've gone back and made a list of every occasion and what I recall of what he said. I've emailed two of my colleagues who were at

the event in Frankfurt to ask if they'd be available to make a statement if I take it forwards. I've been very careful to keep the ask neutral as I know too much makes the MPs annoyed if you try and do their job for them. I'll ask the stewards on the plane too."

"He's an idiot"

"Will thinks he has some of the characteristics of a psychopath"

"I imagine he's in the right line of work to know. Is he actually personally frightened?"

"I don't really know. Some of it is worry for Abigail, or even for me, career wise too. But maybe. He's seen what people who are thwarted are capable of. He did say he was going to talk to his boss"

"Ok. Sounds sensible. He's great Hannibal. I like him enormously. And he is clearly utterly devoted to you"

"Do you think? I did wonder if it might be partly for Abigail's benefit"

"You did not!"

"I've not made tremendously good decisions relationship wise the last five years or so. I'm not entirely confident in my ability to judge these things any more"

"Hannibal, darling, I know it's hard to assess when you see him for two days and then a huge gap and then two days and, well, with letters and what, two Skype calls and three phone conversations? Of course. But I believe him when he says he loves you. I hope you will too. I think he's a keeper. Really Hannibal. Think about it, what's the best that could happen? Actually, really, what is the best that could happen? In five years time what would it look like? Don't over think just tell me, go"

He doesn't pause just throws out,

"I'd be back in the US, probably the Pentagon, Abigail would have changed schools so we'd have found somewhere closer to both our workplaces, and we'd already be married. Oh."

"Yeah, 'oh', can I just say, and without breaking any confidences because I want Will to keep trusting me, you are as bad as each other, but you are also as wonderful as each other. I love you Hannibal. You're allowed to get it right, and be happy, and can I be your 'best man'?"

"If there are such things, of course. I don't see why it has to be utterly traditional with military salutes and everything. Oh."

"Yeah, see. You can already picture it can't you?"

"I hadn't really realised. It's gone a bit far a bit fast."

"Now you're just lying to me and yourself. Stop it. Right now."

……

"Ok Abigail, by the time we get back you'll probably be asleep. If you're completely zonked Sargeant Budge will text me and we won't disturb you. Ok? Then we'll come and get you from Private Lass in the morning. Or you can ring us when you wake up?"

Abigail nods, she's pretty on board with her daddy's complex bribery that is in place for this evening and when they get back. And Private Lass is pretty awesome. And there's going to be a movie and popcorn. And maybe they'll make a proper card for Hannibal which they'll put under their door. Abigail is also on board with no one letting on about them knowing it's his birthday. She's expecting a very large something that might be pink and have ears in the duty free at Charles de Gaul airport.

"Bye bye. Have a nice time. Don't tread on Hannibal's feet"

Hannibal hugs her and Will sticks his tongue out at her,

"Will? Are you bringing a coat, we might need to walk a little. Scarf and gloves too"

"Really? A moonlit walk in Paris in January with my sweetie. Lovely. It's not raining is it?"

Hannibal is still momentarily hung up on being a "sweetie" before he checks the blinds to the room,

"Actually possibly a little snow?"

"Alright! Snow. Of course I want Abigail to make it home for school but the thought of getting snowed in with you is fantastic."

"A cabin in the woods fantasy?"

"No, a being snowed in with you fantasy. Actually my top fantasy right now is just being with you for several days with no drama and just a lot of time to be normal. Sex and dinner and discussion and books and music and washing up and walking the dogs"

"It sounds very domestic"

"I am domestic. I am quite dull"

"It absolutely wasn't a criticism. Shall we go? There's lots to talk about, and we get to dance, and eat dinner, and I can tell you about the books I have open on my nightstand that I'd like to get round to reading back at base. You can tell me about the best walks near home, and what you'd listen to if you were very happy or very sad"

"I quite enjoy telescoping everything into a few days except for the big gap between them, because it means they're each so memorable. We're never going to forget this weekend. Even if I have been a bit hysterical some of the time. Sorry, for being a drama princess, oh, and my gloves aren't in my pockets. Damn."

"I have a pair, we can share, hold hands and gloves on the other ones?"

"You are so awesomely romantic! I love that. Damn. Oh, hey, I got Margot's mum to knit Bev and Molly a smitten on their first year of being together. It's basically a mitten for two hands with two thumbs and everything. Bev cried with delight, I think Molly just cried. I got them two other mittens so they'd have warm hands"

"You are a very sweet friend. Ready?"

"Dinner, dancing and just you? Totally"

…….

“Warm enough?”

“Bit cold. More of the arms round me would be good. I didn't know they lit it at night like this.”

“It'll start twinkling in about a minute. I'll show you the outside of my apartment. It's only ten minutes from here.”

“Can you see the Eiffel Tower from it?”

“Just from the attic. The bedroom is in a small garret at the top, a split level”

“Do you have skylights?”

“And a telescope. Not very big, but yes”

“You're my dream guy. Where to next, ohhh that is very nice”

The Eiffel Tower begins its twinkling. Lots of flash photography goes off and Hannibal stands just behind Will his arms around him, both of them looking up at it.

“Isn't it. So, walk past the apartment and then dancing. Did you enjoy dinner?”

“I did. I thought the maitre d was hilarious, did he really know you or was that a put on?”

“He's known me since I was about eleven I'd say. He's worked there a long time. He's mostly retired but it's a family place so he still comes in and bosses everyone around.”

“He likes the uniform.”

“He does. I will admit that's partly why I wore it. It matters to him too. His family was liberated. He thinks he survived because of the assertive advance of the US military and British Army in that part of Poland at the end of the war.”

“It's still close for so many people. I know you know I'm not wild about it. But that doesn't mean I don't appreciate why or who or even what. Sometimes.”

“I'm not expecting you to become an apologist. It's what I do. Actually I want to ask you about this. This is partly Mischa encouraging me, or us, not to be idiots.”

“Oh yes? Idiots? I love her already. Actually, I shouldn't be facetious about it. I like her enormously as a person, and she gets loved just for being your sister. I can see both Abigail and I will love her just for being her. Sorry, go on”

“That's kind, I love Mischa. She is part of the package, so to speak. She suggests I begin the process of transferring back to the US. Is that something you'd welcome? I know it's soon to ask but it can take quite a lot of time”

“It's not too soon. Well. Probably, if I was being very logical and sensible, but let's see where that got me? So, would it mean a demotion or you getting stuck? Would you get another posting overseas later?”

“I hadn't got that far. It was, let's call it an opening salvo, I wanted to see if you'd want that”

Will stops him on the almost empty street, just a hand to his arm so that he can see Hannibal's face as he asks,

“How long might it take?”

“Could be a year, or more, or a bit less, it depends on openings and other factors.”

Will takes a deep breath, on such small moments the whole world turns.

“Please. I will talk to Abigail, because she gets something of a say, but for me, yes. Please”

“I know there will be a lot more to discuss first, but I'll put out some feelers, there are two Generals who might be interested if I was.”

“Ok. I don't know what that means but ok. Good. I won't make a big thing of it to Abs. Partly I want to find out in a week or two how this has gone from her point of view.”

“And from yours?”

“I already know. And I know I stopped us here, but it really is cold and I've almost warmed up to the idea of dancing”

“Kiss me first?”

Under the street lamps. In the sleet. In Paris. On such things and the more mundane does the world turn.

……..

“That was your Sargeant, he says Abigail is out like a light. What would you like? More dancing or we could go back to the hotel and I'll take you to bed and do it properly this time?”

Will sits down next to Hannibal at the cabaret style table. The bar turned club is quite busy and touristy but not horrible and clearly caters for a gay crowd on a Sunday,

“You didn't get it wrong before”

“Yeah. Right. Maybe not. Ok. So, which would you like, and you should know by the way that I know it is your birthday and I have a few things for you which should possibly wait for the hotel, though you can open Abigail's now”

Will pulls out a small package from his inner coat pocket lying beside him folded on another chair, it's wrapped in silver paper with a blue ribbon, Hannibal picks it up, there's a label

“To Hannibal with lots of birthday kisses. Love from Abigail”

She's put so many kisses on the sticker she's almost obliterated the writing, Hannibal smiles as he begins to undo the ribbon which he pockets.

“How did you know? Will?”

“Passports. And possibly help from one of your colleagues. So, concentrate on this, because I promised a picture for Abigail”

Hannibal laughs when he sees the tie pin and cufflinks, both shaped like Godzilla.

“Oh these are perfect. Did she choose them?”

“You can't pass the blame onto me. She chose them. They're pretty good aren't they?”

“If they have matching Godzuky ones we could get you a set”

“We’re not being that kind of couple!”

“But we are being a couple?”

“If I was Mischa I'd slap you and say 'keep up', but I'm not. So. Yes. Yes we are. A couple. For real. Come on, put those in a safe pocket and one more dance then back to the hotel. More presents”

“You make it sound so tantalising”

“I'm working it.”

……..

The taxi lets them off outside the hotel, the snow is coming down harder now, but the Commisionaire is still there to open the doors even though it's not long before midnight. Inside they stamp the snow off their shoes and take the elevator up to their floor.

“I'll just check for a text, did I give you the key?”

“I've got it, is everything alright?”

Will thumbs through his cell,

“Seems to be, nothing after the one at eleven saying she'd woken up and wanted pizza”

Hannibal smiles, pizza?

“Ok, so, have a seat, I borrowed candles from reception and stuff. And the cake should be in the fridge”

“We haven't really done birthdays in the family, not once we reached adulthood”

“No? Well, now you have an eight year old and their expectations to manage. And her slightly sentimental father. And new memories and traditions to create”

Hannibal is quiet as he watches Will pull out a small cake box and two plates from the fridge and cupboard. He collects a pair of glasses and a half bottle of champagne too.

“I forgot to ask for matches! Ok, unlit candles. I'll just dim the lights a bit. Present first or cake first? I could feed you the cake? In bed?”

“In that case present first?”

“Good decision I think. Ok. Hand?”

Hannibal stretches out his hand and Will puts the little box in it. In the end he hasn't wrapped it. It's enough as it is, he smile slightly, and is pretty pleased with himself when he sees Hannibal’s face when he opens the box. Especially when Hannibal opens the little case.

Inside are a few more tiny drawings. Things that have emerged over the last two days. But Will has interspersed those cards with other cards, each with a short epigram or saying. Hannibal takes them out, there are five,

“there's one for each month we've known each other. I'll add one each month until we get to a year. You know the quote on the cover?”

“I know the quote Will”

“That's how it is Hannibal”

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 25

Chapter Summary

NSFW Pretty much from the start of the chapter until the end.

Hannibal pulls Will to him and sits him on his lap,

“Stop what you're doing for a moment. When did you find the time?”

“Bending time is one of the laws of single parenthood. Scientists have made a study of it”

“Will?”

“I squeezed them in here and there, and the jewellers downstairs was very helpful”

“Lovely. I don't quite have words for what I'm thinking right now”

“You've got time, look there's one more thing, if the guys downstairs could get it sorted on a Sunday. Read the quotes, decide about which pictures. Then I'm feeding you cake”

“A perfect birthday, though it's after midnight now”

“It'd still be your birthday at home so don't try to wiggle out of it”

“I wouldn't dream of it”

Will kisses him and enjoys the fact that whilst Hannibal might not be corralling words he's managing everything else just fine. He extracts himself and Hannibal smiles as he backs away towards the bedroom,

“Just a couple of minutes”

Hannibal perches his glasses on his nose again,

‘If you press me to say why I loved him, I can say no more than because he was he and I was I’ Montaigne

‘It is not Death that a man should fear, but never beginning life’ Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher soldier and emperor,

‘Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies’ Aristotle

‘Keep love in your heart. A life without it is like a sunless garden when the flowers are dead’ Oscar Wilde, and how appropriate for Paris. Next time they should go to the cemetery of Pere Lachaise to look at his memorial. Kiss the cold stone.

And another shorter quotation from Dante ‘remember tonight for it is the beginning of always’

“Hannibal, come and help, I actually can't manage on my own,”

In the bedroom Will is trying to manoeuvre a large oval mirror cased in mahogany and on reluctant casters.

“This is hellish heavy, it must have taken three of them. Help me work out where to put it”

Hannibal's smile starts small but takes over his whole face,

“How much did you bribe them?”

“Mostly begging and whining and maybe some euros, and I've got this look I borrowed from Buster?”

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, and Will does the most appealing pathetic needy puppy eyes possible. Hannibal laughs,

“That would do it. I do appreciate the gesture. Very much”

Will has a small shiver, Hannibal has a particular pitch of voice and timbre to it which comes out when he is aroused. Will hasn't decided yet if it's intentional. As far as he's concerned it works.

“If we fix it first, then I'll feed you cake”

“I might like to eat the cake from you. Maybe no hands?”

“Fuck. Ok. Definitely help me”

“Let me undress you first. We’ll need a certain amount of trial and error with the mirror. Shall I put the lights down just a little?”

“Please. Come here”

Hannibal goes and makes steady progress against Will’s clothes. Will realises his own fingers are trembling.

“This is the full range of fastenings. But you look good in it”

“Still not a uniform thing though?”

“No. Sorry. If that's a thing for you”

“Not in the slightest. But it often is”

“You look hot anyway”

He undoes Hannibal’s pants and slides them down his legs following their path with his hands, Hannibal rests a hand on his shoulder to step out of them. Will runs both hands up the outsides of Hannibal’s calves and thighs.

“You have excellent legs. I'm definitely a leg man”

He buries his face in the groove of Hannibal's groin and rubs his nose there, up and down.

“Pretty damn perfect”

The rest is managed slowly but steadily, by the end Will is flushed and Hannibal half hard,

“Lie on the bed, push all the covers back, let’s see if we can get the angles right”

Will smiles, it is, after all, Hannibal's show. He can have exactly what he wants. And Will can play up to it a little. He stretches out, legs slightly akimbo, one hand behind his head, resting on a pillow, his other hand lightly on his stomach, almost but not quite pointing to his own cock, slowly thickening.

He makes a movement against the sheets, Will doesn't make much noise during sex but he moves a lot, pushes up against Hannibal, against the sheets, uses the linens as leverage by holding them and twisting, uses his feet to lift himself, arches his back. The word that comes to mind for Hannibal is lithe. Lithe and malleable. It's impossibly enticing for him.

“Let me see”

Hannibal manoeuvres himself beside Will and places his hand atop Will’s on his stomach. He looks down the length of their bodies and looks in the mirror. Close.

“Back in a moment”

He twists the angle of the mirror on its pivot and sits back again,

“Better.”

He slides forwards on the bed again and pushes one side a few inches and then pulls it back a little,

“Yes. Like this. Will. Any particular requests? Or do I get my way?”

“Establishing birthday traditions?”

“Just clear desires”

“Please”

He gasps a little when the first thing Hannibal does is grasp his cock and languorously pull and then open his mouth with a deep kiss, he pushes his own hands into Hannibal's hair and pushes up from the bed from the pelvis. At first Will tries to catalogue the different places Hannibal touches or kisses him, but he gradually just lets go into the flow of shifting hands and mouth.

The way Will moves against and with him is exactly what Hannibal wants, the closeness, the heavy intimacy, the sheer erotic thrill. Will stutters sometimes in his movements, perhaps the physical equivalent of a moan,

“Hannibal”

All Hannibal wants is to give Will that thready experience again and again until Will is soaked with desire.

“Turn a little, I'll suck you. I want to watch your face, turn your head?”

Will sighs and shifts his legs and moves his head to look into the mirror, the sharp moment when Hannibal makes eye contact as he swallows round him makes him buck sharply,

“Oh”

Hannibal uses one hand to push Will’s legs wider apart, the other to hold the base of Will’s cock, just massaging slightly behind it. Will arches again,

“Sorry. It's. god”

Hannibal simply hums and Will does it again, this time accompanied by an involuntary whine, Hannibal looks at his face in the mirror, the concentration on pleasure in Will’s face, the rush to awareness when he sees he is seen. He smiles round Will’s cock and pulls back a little,

“On your front. So you can still see”

He pushes Will with one hand and Will moves across the bed, changing the angle of his body, he lifts to accommodate the pillow Hannibal pushes under his hips,

“You first, then cake. Alright?”

“You don't have to, really, it's..”

“Shh”

Will buries his face into the sheet until he realises Hannibal is waiting for him to watch them, he looks in the mirror again, if ever he doubted that Hannibal was doing exactly what he wanted as he wanted it, these are eased away by the look of sheer possessiveness and desire he sees.

“Further apart. So I can see you before I taste you”

Will spreads his legs further and then slightly twists so he can raise a knee against the sheets,

“Good”

The first few sliding licks and wet probes against his hole he wonders how in hell no one tells you these things. Then he looks in the mirror and he's almost undone by it. Hannibal, with a look of passionate concentration and enjoyment on his face, half buried as he penetrates Will with his tongue, Will twists and closes his eyes and stretches out along his back and legs and then moans,

Hannibal lifts his head to check Will is alright,

“don't stop. Amazing. That's amazing. God.”

Hannibal lets a smile cross his face and returns to his feasting. Will would be embarrassed by the amount of noise he makes, and the sight he is when he catches his own eye in the mirror, he realises the steady short breaths and panting noises are him, but he practically levitates off the bed when Hannibal adds a finger to the mix. Will hadn't even been aware he'd retrieved the lube.

“Oh. Oh. Hannibal”

Is he sobbing? He might be. Hannibal adds a second finger and Will pushes hard into the bed, god. He might come from this.

“Will, are you close, can I suck you again?”

Will remembers the picture, god, he's going to suck him off, fingers in his arse and then fuck him, god, right now,

“Please, Hannibal, please, don't stop”

Hannibal laughs against him which makes Will make a small happy desperate cry and then Hannibal has him in his mouth again, three fingers twisting. Will somehow grabs Hannibal's other hand and sucks two fingers into this mouth, sobbing round them, begging. When there's a twist he pushes and then shudders and pulses into Hannibal's mouth no time for any warning.

“Sorry, I.. god.”

Hannibal chuckles around him and pulls back a little still moving his fingers, still keeping Will open and sopping wet with spit and lubrication and maybe even a few tears of his own,

“Shh. Oral. Remember. Perfect, Will, just perfect. Turn again. Lift up, so we can both see”

Will is overstimulated and still not enough, and he slides onto his front again and lifts, Hannibal carefully takes him by the waist,

“Can you see?”

Almost dizzy with lust and want and orgasm he lifts his head to see Hannibal smiling close to his shoulder, licking there, nuzzling,

“I can see. Hannibal, please, fuck me, finish in me, please”

“My darling. I'll suck you here too, just below your shoulder, yes?”

Will nods, the angles will be good, he'll see Hannibal hovering there and possessing him,

“Yes.”

When Hannibal pushes into him, Will manages to shudder and moan and shift so that Hannibal makes his own exhalations of pleasure,

“Good. God. Will. Perfect. You're perfect. God. I'm going to be a little harder. Oh.”

Will moans louder and his overstimulated prostate makes him leak further,

“Fuck, Hannibal, fuck, more, just, harder please, god. That's. Oh”

It's different to before, Will making more noise, both of them, Hannibal almost pulling Will up against him as he thrusts harder, puts his lips to Will’s shoulder and sucks and sucks and Will pushes up against him as if he could be consumed this way. There's a moment of split second stillness and Hannibal thrusts even harder a few times and comes.

…….

The cake is eaten somewhat later

.....

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 26

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Have we got everything? Sargeant are they holding the car at the door?”

“Sir. Private Lass is being stern and demanding”

Hannibal looks at his Sargeant at Arms, raises an eyebrow,

“She's very good at being clear with what’s required and when”

“Is she? One for the team then?”

“She'd do a good job”

“Alright. I'll see if there's any movement in that area”

“Sir. She could go a long way”

“What about you Tobias?”

“Maybe two more. I'm good at what I do. I'd rather be a big fish in a small pond”

“Well you're a wise man to know what suits. I'm going to see about making the transfer stateside Tobias. Any interest in that for you?”

“Sir, permission to speak candidly?”

“Of course, it’s just us, for now”

“I've a partner back home who'd welcome it, she's patient, but she'd like me home”

“And for you?”

“I learn a lot from you Sir, I'd be proud to”

Hannibal nods and then smiles widely as Abigail comes and rubs at his arm,

“What is it?”

“We've put everything in the car. Daddy says I can have Hello Kitty at the airport. Not the very biggest because that's bigger than me. But big. Did you like your card?”

“I did. I've put it beside the bed. Do you want to see?”

She nods, so he opens the folding doors, and there the card is, possibly a pink Godzilla, for which he blames Private Lass, or Sargeant Budge, or both,

“I'll make sure I pack it carefully and we can put it in a frame later, yes?”

“Do you know when you can come and see us again?”

“Not yet. But we can talk about it soon. Alright?”

“Ok. I'm going to do show and tell, can I use some of your pictures?”

“Of course you may. Anything else?”

“Sargeant Budge told daddy he'd email the best pictures from yesterday”

“Good. That should be perfect. Where's daddy right now?”

“Daddy is lamenting how cold it is. Seriously! I am a southern boy. Abigail, hat and gloves and scarf, they're next door, go get them ok?”

Hannibal smiles and pulls Will to him, holds him, strokes his hair,

“Soft southern boy? Lovely boy”

“Shut up. None of that. Are you ready? It's snowing a bit more, and is way colder. We should go. Especially if the roads are going to have a hissy fit about a little snow”

“Better than London where you'd think it never turns up the hysteria it causes. I'm ready. Have you everything Will?”

“Apart from sneaking you home? Yeah. Did Tobias say? Miriam has terrified the commissionaire into keeping the car at the door. She wears her uniform well”

……..

“You should just go. I thought it was bad seeing you off. This is way worse. God. The whole walking away thing. Fucking hell. I'll get Abigail. God.”

Will turns away from Hannibal and beckons Abigail from where she has been hugging Hannibal’s staff.

“They got me a special French Kitty! She doesn't even speak Japanese!”

Will looks at the little Hello Kitty doll dressed in a striped Breton top with a tiny beret.

“Oh you guys. Alright, you just win at the whole eight year old thing”

He shakes both their hands, it's possible they look slightly sniffly too. Dammit if goodbye isn't the hardest word after all? Hannibal and Abigail hug each other.

“I don't want to go”

“I know my lovely. Can you help daddy be brave? He's a bit upset too”

“He doesn't want to go either”

“But he does want to be with you. Will you look after him a bit on the plane?”

She nods,

“We might see that nice lady and the funny man again”

“You might. Alright, I think we're going to say goodbye now. Back through the gate? Yes?”

“I know. Did you see French Hello Kitty?”

“She's lovely, maybe she's goodbye kitty?”

Abigail considers this a moment, this is quite a good idea. Especially as she's a French speaking kitty.

“What's goodbye in French?”

“You might say ‘au revoir’ or ‘a bientot’ they both suggest you hope you'll see the other person again, soon”

“Alright a bientot kitty. A bientot Hannibal. It was a lovely time. Thank you”

“Sweet girl, yes it was. Will, alright then. You go and we’ll go”

“Hannibal”

……..

Georgia stretches. God. Could this be any worse? And isn't that a familiar litany for her?

“I'm sorry Sir, we still don't know. I'm very sorry. The ground staff are worried about ice. The de-icers on the planes can't keep up. I promise we'll make an announcement soon”

Yeah right, she thinks. Maybe they'll decide in about an hour, when all the locals have already realised it's hopeless and gone home and everyone else will try desperately to get back into a hotel overnight and fuck knows how many people will be stuck.

“Georgia? Hello. I'm sorry, this must be a nightmare for you. I'm awfully sorry could I trouble you for some water or something?”

“Hey, Dr Graham? Right? You’re the Colonel’s husband right? Hey, where's Abigail?”

“She's just sitting there. She's got a bit teary, I'm trying to distract her with powdered juice. They wouldn't let me bring liquids through.”

“Of course. I'll get you a cup. Sir, I should probably wait before I say this, but there is a chance we'll be completely stuck. They've closed two of the runways already. And the stop in London is impossible as Heathrow’s been closed.”

“That bad?”

“Who can say. That bad for here. And the Eurostar has been shut down in Brussels and London, they'll probably close Paris too. It'll put pressure on accommodation. And taxis. They might not announce it for a while.”

“We've somewhere we can stay, Hannibal isn't due out for another three days. Actually that might mean some of his colleagues are stuck too. Someone is due from London, maybe Brussels, though

if I'm honest I wasn't really listening at that point. How is it further east?"

"Crapton of snow this side of the Urals. Lots of snow Sir"

"Is that my geography ends at Berlin showing? God. Ok. Is there a point when I can duck out and not be in a world of trouble if they change their minds or there's an act of God?"

"I'd give it another forty minutes. If you come back then I'll give you the heads up."

"I'm beyond grateful. Actually can I ask you something else very quickly?"

She glances round at the various grumbly passengers sitting in the first class lounge. They're only an hour, ok ninety minutes late so far.

"Certainly, go right ahead"

"Hannibal told me there was trouble on his flight a few weeks ago. You slapped his colleague"

"Oh my god, I'm so sorry about that he was just being utterly irresponsible and inappropriate and I know I shouldn't"

"Georgia, I'd like to give you a medal. Honestly. Hannibal is going to be in touch with the lead cabin crew on the day, he hopes you might be willing just to write down what you heard and saw. You don't need to tell me, it's ok. It's not a secret between us. Don't look worried"

"I'm so sorry, my colleague was worried maybe there was some kind of thing. And we should keep out of it?"

"It's not an affair. It's ok. Just someone having a, well, I don't know, being an arsehole really. Hannibal has to decide whether to make a complaint"

"Oh. Ok. I get it. Sure. I can ask Roman too. You remember?"

Will smiles, Roman? Yeah. Who also thought Hannibal 'mighty fine'.

"That'd be great. Thank you. And for the heads up"

……

Miriam Lass gets up to make another round of coffee. As she waits for the machine she edges over to the window and looks out. Wow. It's really coming down out there. She looks back to her boss and Sargeant Budge looking through the papers for tomorrow's meeting. They are all a little subdued.

"Sir, the weather's really bad what time is the General due in?"

"At Gare Du Nord? Sargeant?"

"I'll double check. It should be about 16:30."

He opens a different tab in the lap top on the low table in front of him,

“Email from him, well, his guy. Oh. Oh that's not so good. Apparently they closed the Tunnel and the Brussels line too. Everyone's backed up in St Pancras. Oh. They've attached a picture, oh wow”

He turns the laptop round first so Hannibal and then Miriam can see, a long long line of miserable people in the snow and ice on a grey and red brick lined street.

“Dreadful. What’s the forecast?”

Tobias turns it round and carries on reading,

“Oh. They're saying at least thirty-six hours and that's before they clear the backlog. They're not even flying people, Heathrow is closed and so is Stanstead. Oh, and Luton. Where's Luton?”

“South east England. What about the airports here?”

Tobias spends a few minutes tabbing and searching, mainly for a site in English until he remembers of course his boss speaks French.

“They’ve closed Orly oh, and Charles De Gaulle. Oh damn. They closed it two hours ago. They won't have got out”

Hannibal looks at him, a flash of anxiety crossing his chest,

“Can you check? Which airline?”

“Sure Sir I can look, I've got the details. Ok. Ok. Wait a sec. they're updating. Ok. Ok. The flight was cancelled. Indefinite layover. Also looking at 36 hour minimum. I should check that.”

Hannibal gets up to go to the bedroom and retrieves his cell from the nightstand,

“It's saying no service. Is the weather really that bad?”

Miriam pulls her cell out of her pocket,

“Also no signal Sir. They'll have got a taxi. They'll come back for sure.”

“Alright, how can we find out? When will they have known. Miriam make the coffee. Tobias email the General back and the other teams. See what everyone wants to do. Miriam get the other lap top or my tablet, where is it? Ok. Right. Let's try and work this out.”

Half an hour later they've each drunk coffee, the meeting has been postponed, the streets outside the hotel near the Place De La Concorde and the Champs Elysees are blanketed by snow and the weird kind of silence a heavy fall brings with it. Everything dampened down. They haven't really come up with a way forwards about Abigail and Will, each of them regularly checking their phones.

‘Alright. Can we phone the airport or is that as futile as it sounds? It's alright I can see you both think it is. Well. This is ridiculous, there must be something. Alright. We can at least get some food so we have something to give them when they make it back. Miriam, something suitable for Abigail? You have nieces her age?”

“Sir, no problem, and for Dr Graham?”

“Probably some soup, and bread and cheese and pate I think. Actually do you need me to do it? French?”

“I can manage Sir. They understood me yesterday”

“Thank you”

She phones the room service number and Hannibal shifts to the window. He wonders if this is anything like it was for them when his base was bombed. It's hot sick feeling of helplessness and worry, and that's without the presence of an actual explosion in the background. It's both beautiful and clearly terrible conditions outside. So much for being snowed in.

When room service comes fifteen later Miriam gets the door and instead of one of the waiting staff it's Will and Abigail.

“Miriam take her, she's cold and I'm frozen. We walked the last mile. Damn”

The bellhop comes in behind him and drops off Wills bag and Abigail's little backpack. Tobias steps in and tips him,

“Will, oh thank god. We had no idea how to contact you. We've got warm food coming, come with me, I've some warmer clothes next door. Miriam bring Abigail we’ll make sure she's alright”

Abigail clings to Miriam's neck. She'd managed to walk most of the way but Will had carried her for the last fifteen minutes or so.

“Here, get her out of her coat, here, my darling girl under the quilt. We'll make you a hot water bottle, Tobias that remarkably badly insulated thing will do. Not boiling but close. Abigail, snuggly?”

She nods,

“Better. Can I have kitty please?”

Miriam rescues Kitty from her bag and sits beside her in the bed and cuddles her through the duvet and keeps a thread of chatter going,

“Will? How cold are you? Tobias find the blankets from Abigail's bed. Let's check you?”

He moves Will’s coat off and as the blankets arrive her wraps Will up, holding his hands,

“I don't think you’re hypothermic. But we'll watch for that. How cold, inside?”

“Just shivery. I think. A bit achey. She's heavier than she looks”

He tries to smile but a shudder runs through him,

“Fucking snow. Sorry. Ok, bit better.”

“We won't give you anything warm to drink yet, just tepid, I know, quite vile, better not to shock the system”

“I'm already shocked. And Miss Bloom is gonna be so pissed”

Abigail hears him,

“Daddy? Am I in trouble”

“No curly girl. Just the weather is”

…….

Chapter End Notes

Christmas 2010 it snowed in Paris, and I was due to meet the person who became my husband, for the first time. I was in Paris, being all cosmopolitan and stuff. Sadly, I was due to meet him in London. We'd never met before. Been introduced by his mama. Everything had been email and telephone before then. It really snowed. And snowed. I love Paris. In the fucking springtime. Without all the airports closing and no Eurostar and for gods sake all these grumpy tourists (yeah, me too) and with eight inches of snow. But hey. I could have been in that queue at St Pancras instead. Oh and my Uncle died and I couldn't get back for the funeral because I was sitting on the floor at Charles de Gaul. Hell romantic. Not.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 27

Chapter Notes

Hurt/comfort

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I'm working my way up to seeing this is as a bonus rather than being terrified”

“You don't need to be, watch for that puddle”

“I'm not jet lagged this time. And we don't have Abigail to run offence”

“Will”

“I'm alright really, just shooting my mouth off out of nerves”

“It was mama who invited us”

“Yeah. Sorry. God I'm being like an eleven year old”

“I think you're exaggerating”

“What, I'm like nine instead? No you're right. I'm just a bit anxious. Just stop a second. Let's try this again.”

They stop at the side of the street, the slush is still lying but it's beginning to clear. All of them have flights the following day, east and west. This later afternoon tea is an opportunity for Will and Hannibal to see Simonetta and the Count on their own. Will takes a few deep breaths. Hannibal regards him, in some ways intrigued by the manner in which Will simply makes visible all the things that Hannibal has carefully learned to either submerge or simply deny.

“Ok. They want to see us. They asked us. They were pleased the opportunity was there. Even if Abigail wasn't available.”

“Will darling, they like you for yourself not just as Abigail's father. Papa hasn't stopped raving about you”

“Ok. That's kind of him. He's very like you and not like you too. I like him”

Hannibal regards him somewhat sardonically,

“When I went to Prom I took a friend and my lovely papa spent the whole evening before and after damn flirting with him”

“Did he? Well there you are. He can be sweet to me and I'll flirt right back.”

Hannibal looks at him,

“I'd rather you didn't”

Will smiles,

“Hannibal, I like you for you, not for your father.”

“Oh very good. Oh that's just perfect. Alright, we both have our anxieties. Fair enough. Actually, well done. You're quite right. It does bother me.”

“Because he's charming and twinkles and manages to make absolutely innocent things sound filthy and vice versa”

“You've noticed then?”

“Hannibal, I have. You do get some of your humour from him. But one of the things I like about him is that if you age as well as he has I shall consider myself lucky. He's sweet to me. Of course I like him. And he adores you. Bonus. A parent who clearly likes and admires their adult son and doesn't berate him for his life choices. Or at least you haven't said so.”

“No, that's true, he's always been supportive of most of my choices. I think the thing with Matthew aged him. He'd always got on with Andrew, it's hard for him to see his friends son go so adrift. Alright? It's just ahead”

“Which apartment?”

Will looks up at the building, fine, beaux arts, Hannibal looks up at it his head to one side,

“The whole house”

Will looks at him,

“The whole house? Ok. Fine. The whole house. Dammit. I've seriously underestimated.. shit.”

“Will, stop it. It's just a house”

Will looks at him,

“Alright, not just a house. But hadn't you realised? I did say”

“I guess I was letting one thing intimidate me at a time. Hannibal. God. Sorry. Ok, just. Look, say something helpful here.”

“Would you love me if I had arrived in Baltimore with a duffel bag and just what I stood up in?”

“Well of course. That's what you did”

“That's what I did. That's who I am. Yes there's the family and the castle. But almost everything I own fits into a duffel and maybe a dozen boxes. Oh and some truly dreadful furniture which I can't quite bring myself to sell. But that doesn't count because if I could palm it off on Mischa I would.”

“Just you and the duffel bag? And a dozen boxes. Though I want to look over the furniture before we reject it completely.”

“And eventually a castle. And yes the house here, which I shall split with Mischa although we're arguing about who gets the house in Japan from Robertus and Murasaki”

“Kyoto did she say?”

“That's right”

“That's ok. You can keep that one”

“Really? Oh. Not because of Godzilla?”

“Abigail would kill me”

“Thank God for Toho. Better?”

“Yeah. Alright. Sorry. I'm doing so well aren't I?”

“You were right about the telescoping. It's memorable but it also leaves very little breathing space between things. Let's just breathe a bit”

“Hannibal, I told Mischa this, I'm very afraid of screwing this up”

“And you think you're the only one? I'm terrified. But really, I'm willing to live with the terror, because I believe it will dissipate, in time. We need to give ourselves time.”

……..

“Why are they standing outside?”

“I think they're talking about something. Possibly the house”

“Darling, do you think Will might be a little intimidated?”

“Simonetta, I think that may be why Hannibal suggested supper somewhere other than here. I suppose it is intimidating. Viewed objectively”

“Shall I show him the dry rot?”

“You could. And the damp in the downstairs bathroom”

“Or the woodworm”

They both laugh.

“Has he grown on you?”

“I can see that Hannibal is genuinely happy. And though I think Will is more anxious than is good for him I can see where some of the roots of it must lie. I will try very hard not to make it worse or harder. For either of them”

“My lovely girl”

“Hardly, not anymore”

“You always will be. Shall we wave at them or wait for them to knock?”

“Can you think of anything I can do to help Will see I know I was somewhat bitchy?”

“Somewhat?”

“Alright, quantifiably bitchy. I've never been good at this with him”

“I know love. Let's see if we can manage a bit differently with Will. You could even ask him about it”

Simonetta looks at her husband, such a lot of ground to make up. And where do you begin if you're not even sure where you are on the map?

“I'll go and let them in”

The Count smiles at his wife, it will be good if she can reconcile herself. And be real and treat Hannibal as he is rather than as she'd like him to be.

“Thank you, I'll go and manage the tea. Or do you think Will drinks only coffee?”

“I'll ask him, shall we come down to the kitchen?”

“Actually yes. Do that”

……

Hannibal smiles at his mother, how unusual of them to take tea in the kitchen. Oh. Maybe that's the point. Just to be a bit more normal. Well, that's both sensitive and kind.

“Thank you Mama. It's kind of you to ask us”

“I'm sorry we couldn't put you up. You have got accommodation tonight?”

“It's fine. We were booked to stay until tomorrow, the hotel just put Will and Abigail back on the books.”

“Is Abigail aright? Will did she get chilled”

“She's alright, thank you. She's off with Hannibal's colleagues right now. I'm sorry. If we'd thought about it we'd have asked you”

“Not at all. She's very interesting, and I'm glad we'll get to know her. But it's good for it to be just us too. Thank you.”

Simonetta pauses,

“More tea?”

“Please. I drink a lot of tea. I guess you've realised I get a bit anxious, coffee tends to exacerbate it. I try and limit it”

“Of course you do. You've done incredibly well. With Abigail, with everything really, it must play hell on your nerves with the trouble near the base. I used to hate it when I was at home and all I got

was the occasional letter and rarer call.”

Will looks at her, some genuine fellow feeling there, alright then,

“Thank you. It can be. We're still getting used to it”

“I had a period when I was rather depressed. I didn't handle the separation well. Hannibal was small, before Mischa was born. I tended not to say, kept it too bottled up. I suppose I didn't know better. What about your parents Will, are they supportive?”

“It's only my father, I never knew my mother. My father is a self educated possibly slightly resentful charter runner, boats, mechanic, fishing trips, the like. A lot of my childhood was spent on the road. We ended up around Lake Eeyrie. We get on better now there's Abigail. I don't have siblings. He wanted grandkids. Very much, and wasn't terribly happy with me”

He drinks another couple of mouthfuls of tea, looks at a Simonetta’s interested and maybe concerned face, ok, she's making the effort, he can give a bit too,

“I didn't date at all, all through high school, college, graduate school. When I met Margot it worked for both of us. Really she was gay but her family didn't approve and she desperately wanted a kid. I was just, kind of invisible. But that suited her. Mostly. But she had her own pain. She had very bad post natal depression. That wasn't the whole story but it was hard for her”

Simonetta looks at him, the other men looking at both of them, with the sense to keep quiet,

“You too I expect”

“Yeah. Somewhat. It was somewhat bleak. For a few years. Well, maybe closer to five. And then she was killed. So it was a different kind of awful. We've just tried to find our way forwards. I'm fortunate really because of Abigail. But I have to not use her as a prop. I'm lucky at work too. My boss got me help at the right time. He could see it, he's ex-forces, he'd seen ptsd.”

“Will. I wasn't terribly helpful before. I'm sorry to have compounded things. I’ll try and do better”

“And I was surly”

“So we both did badly. Try again?”

Will glances down at his hands, he's torn the paper napkin to pieces on his lap, he nods,

“We should. I'm sorry”

“I think the onus was on me, given that it's my son whose life you are infinitely improving”

Will smiles then, a proper smile,

“I'd keep checking with him that that's the case. I've managed to be a total drama queen this weekend. And that was before the whole snowed in business”

“I think you're both doing better than we did at the same stage”

“Simonetta, my darling please don't tell them about the thing with your parents. Or indeed mine.”

Simonetta opens her mouth,

“Alright, another time Will. I think it'll make you smile. And it'll give you something to throw back at me if I'm ever as unpleasant again”

“Mama, it's alright.”

“It isn't Hannibal. I appreciate you being kind. But it isn't. But I told your father I'd try harder, or less hard in certain respects. Hannibal? Alright?”

“Thank you mama”

“I know it's only a start Hannibal, I do realise”

Will interjects,

“But it is a start. I'm going to introduce you to my father for sure. And Margot’s dad? I'm sorry to say you’ll have to fight that particular battle from the frontline, he's pretty plain speaking. But I'll have your back. Actually that might just mean I'm hiding behind you. Probably.”

Simonetta laughs,

“If he takes a swipe at Hannibal he can be assured I take no prisoners”

Will grins,

“this I have got to see. Hannibal how can we get your parents and my in-laws and dad in the same room? We could sell soda and popcorn, charge admission”

The Count rumbles,

“Likely to be that bad?”

“Could be, though Molson might go for the while Soldier thing”

“We’ll be supportive Will”

“Good enough. Thank you. I'll email you with the full horror. We're due to go during spring break. No don't look so scared. That's when I plan on sitting down and filling them in properly. I've already drafted a letter. Give them a chance to think about it without me in the room to throw rocks at”

“Religious?”

“Oh. No. Sorry, not those kind of rocks, just rocks in general, not scriptural ones”

“Something I suppose?”

“Let's see shall we.”

……

Chapter End Notes

For those following the drama, we've found a flat to rent after seven weeks of searching and increasing miserableness. So, moving, barring disaster, over the next couple of weeks. Expect more updates! Yay.

And if you're coming to Rdc4 I'll try and make sure we have a tea party either before or after. We'll be in west london. On the right tube lines. Yay. Tea. And cake. And maybe a herb wall! Oh yeah. The flat! When we move come and see the pics on tumblr! Hannibal might approve.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

‘My darling Will,

We’ve just taken off again after the stopover in Saudi. Miriam has got the first class upgrade. She's the tiredest I think and has never been in first class. Tobias and I got bumped into business which is sufficiently luxurious we are both a little awed. I will say for Miriam she has settled in well. Possibly helped by the extremely well tailored business woman she is sitting, well, beside is hardly right in first, sitting near is more accurate. She seems to have a definite thing for uniforms. I believe you would say Miriam is ‘working it’.

I'm a little tired but indescribably happy to have had the extra days. Even with our remarkable capacity to go from heights of lightness to slogging sloughs of self doubt. How refreshing to both be miserable bastards together. Though what you did to mother I cannot say. Apart from that you were yourself and I am utterly grateful for it.

I mentioned before that domesticity was something I aspired to. And didn't imagine dull in the least. So I did want to underline how simply whole it made me feel when we were sitting in the living area Abigail drawing (what was that? I may need more tutoring in appropriate responses to eight year old art, I feel there are only so many times I can say “how interesting, and what lovely colours, do tell me what exactly is going on here, I'm bound to miss the important bits I'm enjoying it so much” before she cottons on to what a fraud I am), you reading, and me trying to do that blasted puzzle. (Really, I don't forgive Jimmy for suggesting them. Please tell him.)

You too. Of course I fear you will find me out, less secure, less confident, less certain in myself than I present, not in work of course. Work is easy, just a certain kind of disposition and expression. Simple really. I've learned all the ways to carry myself through that well. But we can see the fallout from the failings in myself. Oh I shouldn't blame others, even Matthew, nothing happened to me, I happened. But there is much we might manage together to be each other's new happening.

I found what you said about Margot very moving (and selfishly also encouraging, because I'm now the beneficent of that compassion and loving kindness) in part because it was a healthy reminder to me that all the times you decide to ‘throw a hissy’ it is usually (though not always, I hope you'll allow me that) grounded in some experience of the past. I suppose so much of who we are is.

Though I think you exceptionally good at making things anew. Every now and again I find my hand has strayed to my pocket to find the case. To think of all the ways in which we are finding each other. Yes yes, don't laugh at me. I'm thinking about fucking you. I shall dress it up in all the flowery language I like. God I am thinking about fucking you. Perhaps the plane is not the best place to describe to you how. I already feel myself heating and hardening at the thought of your mouth, your touch, your laugh against my skin. Oh dear, that won't do at all.

The crew are making tidy up noises.

You remain my dearest love,

Hannibal

(And for goodness sake don't say to Abigail that I barely included her in this letter! Even if she has her own! Of course all we talk about is her!)'

'Dear Hannibal,

A bientot kitty says hello. We had a nice flight home. Thank you for the nice seats. Daddy says I shouldn't get used to being able to lie down in a plane mostly people are herded together like cats. I'm not sure what he means because you can't herd cats. That's what Miss Bloom says.

Miss Bloom wasn't very cross about the weather. She said daddy did lots of saying sorry and that even he couldn't control the snow. I'm going to do 'show and tell' next week. I think it's next week. It's soon.

My friend Clark says you can't be like my daddy because I've already got a daddy. So you're like a girl. I don't understand what he means. Because you're not a girl. He said it meant you were like mommy. But that's not true either. Can I ask you about it instead of daddy? Daddy gets sad about mommy. And I think Clark was being mean. I love you like mommy. But I don't really remember her very much now. I think that's naughty of me. Clark said if you're naughty you don't get a new mommy. His friend Peter hit him and Miss Bloom was very cross.

Our class has got a new hamster. Only we're not supposed to say. The other one got old and died because daddy says it's normal for them not to live for very long. But Miss Bloom brought the new one and she's called the same so some of my class think it is the same. But it's not. But she's very sweet, and puts all her food in her cheeks. Can you do that? I've been practising but daddy says it is gross.

I love you Hannibal. I hope you are ok. There's a care for Sargeant Budge and Private Lass, please can you give it to them, it's a drawing of a bientot kitty and hello kitty. A bientot kitty has the beret. I know it's spelled like that and not berry. Daddy told me.

Bye,

Abigail (Graham)

'Dear Hannibal,

You be as flowery as you like. I love it. Romance? Erotica? Deep and meaningful? Good fucking? Seriously! All of it. All of you. Including the fucked up bits. And really that's just reassuring. Because otherwise? I'd be worried about skeletons.

We're ok (obviously not because dammit if you're not fuck off thousands of miles away) but mostly. Work is a bit shit, I can't say too much, (two of us can play at that game hah! Reckoning!) but new one active on the east coast. Or old one playing a new game. Fuck awful. Don't look at the media coverage. We're being hounded by one of the tabloids. I might have said some slightly stupid things. Funny though, I was being funny. She didn't think so. Jack was a bit pissed. There's a reason I'm a tech guy!

Abigail might have had a slightly weird thing at school. Some kid in her class after 'show and tell' she won't fess up to me. But she might say something to you. I promised not to read her letters so she could if she wanted to. So this is a heads up. She got in a bit of trouble because she pinched him. His mom had such a go at me. Really she can shut up, her boy is a little shit, but so is his dad. Miss Bloom I hope has it under control. She scares me!

Can I just say I read your last letter in the lab all innocent like, babe, you have to mark things nsfw! I had to fight Jimmy to get it back. He wanted to know why I went so red! You know why. I'm drawing that this evening. Maybe in time for this letter. Fuck, Hannibal. Really. Damn. I've gotta put Abs to bed. And then manage my boner on my own. I'm going to put that letter in a plastic sheet. I'll let you think about that.

My turn for flowery? I love you more than I have words for. And hey do we do Valentine's Day? That's what? Two weeks? Think about it. I'm expecting flowers at least!

I love you. I can't say that enough,

Will'

…….

"Will come in here for a minute?"

Will looks up at Jack, puts the slides he's been looking at back in the refrigerated translucent safe on his desk and locks it.

"Sure, hang on a tic. Ok. What's up Jack?"

"Reporter woman. Make nice? Not asking Will"

"Really? Oh. For goodness sake. Ok. Yeah. Fair enough"

"Ms Lounds? This is Will Graham, I think you've met"

"Dr Graham, hopefully better circumstances this time?"

"Ms Lounds. I apologise. Normally Jack can trust me to speak for myself, clearly not this time. I mis-spoke"

"Don't apologise, click revenue doubled! For the day at least. You're our new favourite FBI guy. Jack knows I'm here to see if we can work things out"

Faintly Will manages,

"Oh that's great. What does that look like?"

"Oh you know, I feed you tips, you feed me a line"

"A line?"

"A line. With a hook on the end. With bait. Seriously Dr Graham you look like a fishing kind of guy?"

"Ok yeah. On point. Jack?"

"Here's how we run it, Ms Lounds, I talk with my guys, Will says something pithy, you muck around with it. We see if we can push the guy just a little. Will, I'm not throwing you under the bus here. We're not making you the poster boy, un-named source mostly. I've got Frederick and the guy at Harvard to front up. But Frederick, god love him, couldn't be pithy if we paid him. Which we do.

And he is up for it. But that line about ‘thinking about killing people for a living’? Even I can see that's media gold’

“Ok. I get it. But no pictures Ms Lounds, not of me, not again. I've got a kid, I’m not putting us in front of it. Anyway my partner would kill me if I did”

“You gonna talk to him about it Will?”

“Yeah. Probably. See if he's got an opinion. Ms Lounds my partner is front line US forces, he's got enough stress, don't add to it please?”

Freddie eyes him a little, is there an angle to this?

“What about heroes on both fronts? Protect and serve at home and abroad”

Will and Jack laugh,

“I'll just run that past Homeland, see what they say. No Ms Lounds, Dr Graham’s partner is off the table. Except of course Will is going to run this by him. Other people in my team too. I know you've got the thing on Jimmy and Zeller. If I get even a hint of that the deal’s off. Or my wife. Or Dr Katz’s family. Ok? Let's keep it professional. See if we can't do each other some good”

“Not that there's much yet”

Will leans in,

“Not yet. But we're thinking about it. You gotta name for him yet?”

“Not really. One of the runners out of New York wanted ‘wolfman’, but seriously? I'm not doing a Twilight on the guy. That's dead and done. Is it a lunar cycle”

“Good ask. Don't know. Yet.”

“Fair enough, Jack, I think we've paid and played? Dr Graham? Thanks for starting over”

Will smiles a little more than before,

“I'm told I'm good at it”

Chapter End Notes

.....

Hell yeah Freddie Lounds!

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 29

Across the base Hannibal can just make out the gate. The dust is bad today and everyone is wrapped up in scarves and goggles. It's a little like something from a post apocalyptic movie filmed on location in North Africa. Or maybe an updated Lawrence of Arabia. It's not, it's just a base experiencing normal seasonal weather variations. The gate is more heavily monitored at the moment. Since the blast last year there have been a few more efforts to infiltrate. It's a growing concern.

He glances again at his watch. There isn't really time to go to the comms tent. He pats his pocket. It had been an unconscious reach for reassurance until one of his colleagues had commented and asked if he thought he'd lost his wallet. He'd made a conscious effort subsequently not to keep doing so but instead noticed how often he thought of it. Thought of Will.

Will's letters of the last two weeks have sounded alright. Happy in places. Glad. Perhaps a certain kind of settling in some areas. Of course he couldn't help but go and look up the press coverage and felt a flare of annoyance at the picture of Will, head bent, in the process of removing his glasses, his own irritation writ large across his face. From the sound of it things have shifted since then and, if what Will says is true then Ms Lounds is keeping to her side of the bargain. For now at least.

He looks again at his watch. Time to make a move if he's not going to be late. He has a slight twinge in his back. He smiles to himself at the thought that he'd be overjoyed if it was the result of something very energetic involving Will and possibly something waist height that he could be bent over. He has a small flare of desire at the thought. It would work for either of them to be bent over like that. Hannibal is harbouring a small desire for Will to .. he's interrupted in his thoughts by his Sargeant,

"Sir? Sorry? Sorry"

"Catch your breath. What's the rush?"

"General Davies on the line. Washington. Can you come?"

"Of course. This second?"

"He's actually on the line waiting. I've told the Major you'll be a tiny bit late for the meeting. They're going to wait"

"Right then. I'll come now. On the line? Unusual for him. Not his man?"

"No Sir. Must be important"

"It must"

For a moment he wonders about Matthew Brown and some kind of trouble, but that's just the bit about Washington.

……

"Hannibal? This line is crap. Is it always this bad?"

“Sir. Sometimes. We've bad weather right now”

“You’ve always got bad weather”

There's some truth in this and Hannibal smiles.

“How can I help Sir?”

“I won't say who but someone slightly higher up would quite like you to come and do a small something for us here. Nothing big. Just a bit of NATO work. The language skills would be useful and it's a need to know so we're trying to keep it, well, you understand?”

“Sir. Only my French and Russian are up to snuff really. Oh and Lithuanian. I'm not sure how useful that'd be. Oh. I see. I'm rather better known than might be helpful?”

“I've worked that bit. We want them in the loop. It'd work to our advantage. And theirs. How's your, what is it Dari? Farsi? Or is it just Arabic?”

“Enough Sir. To get by. I'm not fluent”

“Nicely put Hannibal. I imagine your idea of not fluent and mine are very different. We'd want you quite soon. About a week. I've got someone lined up to hold the fort while we borrow you. We'd have you here maybe two months. We're trying to make it look like just a normal part of trying someone out. I'm not parading your language skills. In fact the opposite. Get it?”

“Sir.”

“Good. Look, and you can tell me to butt out of what isn't my business..”

Hannibal's heart sinks this will be about Matthew for sure,

“My wife saw Iris Brown, she said you're seeing someone over here? Is there any chance she'd be persuaded to make this look like a partially domestic try out? You know, guy comes home, visits the girlfriend, sees if they can make it work back home?”

Hannibal takes a deep breath, all in then,

“It's not a woman. He works for the FBI, eight year old daughter. We met through the Adopt A Soldier Scheme. I'd understand if that makes it harder for you. Sir.”

There's a silence on the other end of the line and Hannibal has a moment to enjoy just possibly having rendered the General speechless. Which would be a first as far as he knows.

“I didn't know you were gay. Oh. Wait. That Brown thing? I thought that was him being stupid. Wait, don't say anything, it's still him being stupid. Ok. This might even be better. If you'll forgive me it might make people underestimate you somewhat. Think you've levelled out. Would he be willing?”

“What's the vulnerability and risk?”

“I'd say next to zero, it's mostly fact finding. And on home ground. But nothing's without risk. You know that”

“Sir. I'll ask him. But I'm reasonably certain he'll be alright about it. I'll come for sure. I've a place in Baltimore I can use. Can I bring any staff?”

“Your Sargeant? I'd expect it. Anyone else?”

“Got a Private with good language skills, not the European ones. She's small, looks all tidy ponytail and smart shoes. Good with people in a no nonsense way. She's got potential.”

“Alright. Bring her along. Make it clear this is all temporary. All right? A week. We’ll get you started on the 18th”

“Sir, is there any option to arrive for the 13th?”

“Keen of you?”

“Valentine's Day”

The General laughs a happy surprised sound.

“Good god. You're another damn romantic! Yes, alright. I'll get your replacement out there for the 11th. God she'll hate me. I said the 14th. Actually she won't mind, I'll owe her two favours. Good job then. Ask your Sargeant to be in touch later. And thank you.”

“Thank you Sir”

He closes down the line and looks over at Sargeant Budge,

“Alright Tobias, that desk can't get any tidier, did you get the gist?”

“Two months stateside. Shall I tell Private Lass. Leaving on the 12th or maybe 11th?”

“Please tell her. And not just her, you too”

“Sir!!!”

…….

>Dear Beverly, I hope this is alright. And please be aware this is the monitored account, but for various reasons I'm going to make it Stateside for Valentine's Day. I know this is something of an ask but could I prevail on you for some help in surprising Will and Abigail? It's part of a wider trip that I shall be speaking with him about, I'm planning on arriving early though. Might you be willing? Should I ask preller? Or would you? Warm regards, Hannibal Lecter<

“What do you think Moll?”

“I think he's a total byronesque romantic nut. God. How can Will resist. Though with Will you gotta know he will always think himself unworthy of any kind of actual love”

“Oh what rather than the obsessive stalker and the obsessive intern kind?”

“Both of those. Does he know about Cassie?”

“Jack’s talked to her. I tried to talk to Will but he honestly didn't have a clue what I was talking about. He just looked at me and said she was very good at monitoring intake and digestive uptake”

“In maggots?”

“In maggots”

“God Bev. Gross. What you gonna do about her?”

“Well, she's had the verbal warning. Jimmy says it won't be enough. He says she sort of follows him around just waiting to have a little chat or to ask a question.”

“Maybe it'd be good for her to see the competition?”

They both pause and have a moment to think about how Hannibal might come across, tall, intensely masculine, attractive, clearly very physical, and given the chance a bit handsy according to Brian who paid a lot of attention at the barbecue, and also evidently not 23 as Cassie is.

“You think she'd realise she's just not in the running?”

“I don't know. Obsession is very singleminded. She's kept all his post it notes to her, in a little folder. I saw. They've got instructions on them, like ‘don't forget to lock the case. Thanks, W’ and ‘batch 3 must be calculated against batch 2 by Wednesday”

“That's a bit sad.”

“It is. But he's also a kind, not a total bastard guy, and a bit oblivious which some people think is sweet and winnable, and a single dad who must surely want to be warmly comforted at night”

“I did”

“Yeah, but you were co-parenting, and Wally isn't a total fool. Well, he is, but not that kind”

Molly smiles, Bev and her ex can be in the same room. And that's it. Nothing else. Same room. If one of them even opens their mouth it's like every bad sit com with an ex in it ever!

“All true. So then what do you think he might want to arrange?”

“We better ask. God, he's not going to propose is he? Fuck!”

……..

Molly reads the email again, and then calls Bev at work,

“Can you talk? Is Will there?”

“No, he's not. He's in the morgue, I can see him and Brian through the door arguing about TOD. I won't tell you any more. It's especially unpleasant. We're going to have to get an extra extractor fan. Waddya got for me girl?”

“Ewww, thanks. Brain rinse please. Actually, an email from the Colonel, and Bev? When did we start calling him that? It makes Will sound like some Regency heroine in a novel with chaperones”

Bev laughs,

“What does the email say?”

“Ok, I'll just read it straight,

>Dear Molly, thank you for picking up where Beverly left off. I appreciate it. And no, not a proposal. Nice to know Will’s friends understand the temptation he might be in that respect though. I'm sure he'd be, something, I'm not sure grateful is the word. He'd certainly deflect and think it rather unlikely. But I appreciate that you think I might be so minded. So, not that. More that I'd very much like to arrive and him think he is maybe waiting for a sorry attempt at a bouquet that arrives a little late and has wilted. But I'm also keen not to disrupt any plans you might have with Beverly. So, might you have a think. Surprise for Will, not disrupt your’s and Beverly’s own evening, warm conspiratorial regards, Hannibal Lecter<

And yeah, he really did say ‘warm conspiratorial regards’, are sure he's not a regency throwback?”

“He might wear those high waist pants things well, and a coat. I'll ask Jimmy. I can't judge these things. Will says he's got a great arse”

“God your team. I hope the Colonel, damn, I did it again, I hope Hannibal, actually, that's not much better, I hope Hannibal realises his better features have been atomised and dissected”

“You wanna hear the best thing? Though Will won't show me?”

“I dunno. Are you supposed to say?”

Bev goes quiet for a moment or two, really Will knows that most of what he says might easily be passed along to Molly, but maybe not this.

“You're right. Probably just for my ears. But man, it gave me ideas. You just wait for Valentine’s girl! I've got a plan now”

“I think that sounds great Bev, except for that incident in New York hovering in the back of my mind”

“You promised you'd never mention it again!”

“I only referred to it. That doesn't count”

“You are in so much trouble when I get home”

Molly smiles.

……

Dear Hannibal,

Two months. TWO MONTHS!!! Ok. I might explode. Alright. I have no idea how that works in practise. Do you need to be in Washington? Do you get weekends off? Can you be here some of the time? Have you talked to your boss at all. Would he be ok about you seeing us? Is there any danger, because then I'd have to think very carefully about it. You know that, right? I'm pretty sure you do.

Ok. I'm practically writing this as I walk to catch the post out of here. Damn. Brilliant. Fucking awesome. Do you have any idea when? I can't believe it.

Yeah ok, quite keen on the idea.

All my love,

Will”

He runs for the post guy at the front desk at Quantico,

“Just a tic, can you frank it? Going into MPSA.”

The guy at the desk smiles, this is becoming something of a regular occurrence, still Dr Graham is a nice guy, and his little girl is a sweetie,

“Yeah, no problem, you ok to wait a tic Barney?”

“Sure. Friend or family in the service sir?”

Will smiles, all in,

“Partner. Getting some time over here. It's the best news”

The postal guy smiles,

“Surely is sir. Very nice too”

……

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 30

Mischa sits on the sofa, she sits here like this sufficiently often that everything she usually needs is within reach; tablet, cell, notebook, propeller pencil, glass of water, current book. And occasionally Cat. Today Cat has disdainfully elected to sit on her lap, eyes shut, every whisker trembling in fury simply at Mischa's existence. Mischa knows better than to stroke her. Cat might elect to butt her head against Mischa's hand. But only if she in no way suggests that she likes it. Either of them.

Mischa puts the letter from Hannibal down, so he's being both sensible and brave. Well done. Well done Hannibal. She pulls her note book to her, extracts a few sides of paper and begins a letter, which she will send to Baltimore. She smiles.

……

“Cassie? I'm sorry to have to ask, did you remember about the rack in the agitator? It has to come out before three?”

“I did Dr Graham. I made a note of it especially. Don't worry. I always listen”

“You're doing a great job, well done. Jack, hey, what can I do for you. We're just talking about, actually I won't tell you, it's almost lunch”

Jack smiles at Will, makes a small nod towards Cassie, she may be doing her job well but he won't have someone in the team over thinking about a colleague. One warning should be enough. But if it's not then he will play hard ball. And he's taken note of the various things that Jimmy has said.

“Can you come and talk to Frederick a minute, he's got some thing with Ms Lounds, he could stand to have a second opinion.”

“I've no opinions Jack. Only bugs”

“Come and talk bugs then. He's got a couple of other things too”

Jack glances at Cassie and even Will gets that Jack is saying nothing further in front of her,

“Alright, I'm on my way. Cassie, thank you. If you're done feel free to finish up and head out. I'll see you tomorrow?”

“Sure Dr G. Thanks. I've got some library stuff to do so I'll get over there. Let me know if you've a problem with the culture?”

“Yes. Of course. Jack, I'm coming, don't look like that”

He smiles very vaguely somewhere between Jack and Cassie Boyle and heads for the door. When they're a little way down the corridor he asks,

“Jack, what about it? Frederick not happy?”

“Not at all. Going great I think. He's got wind that Hannibal's going to be over. He wants to ask you about that”

“Well, I've made no secret of it. Even the post guy knows!”

Jack laughs,

“Yeah, I know. I heard that too”

“We are a small family. Or as dysfunctional as one!”

Jack nods with a rueful smile and holds the door open into his office, Frederick Chilton looks up from reading his cell,

“Thanks Jack, Will, hey, good. Can I ask you a couple of quick things before we talk about this TattleCrime thing? Jack?”

“You want a minute of privacy?”

“If you don't mind me commandeering your office?”

“I'll go get some coffee. Don't look hopeful Will I'm bringing back two cups. Both for me. I've got budget stuff to do later”

“Don't forget to get Bella a card Jack”

“A card?”

“Valentine's Day. Day after tomorrow”

“Is it? Damn. A card won't do it. Right, I'll get coffee and set a reminder. Thanks Will”

Jack fiddles around with his cell as he trundles out of his office to hit up the awful coffee machine just along the corridor.

“Alright then Fred, what's it to be?”

“Will, it’s nothing bad. Take a breath”

Will smiles, huffs maybe a small laugh,

“You got me. Ok? Really?”

“I've heard your partner is coming over? Is that right. Some work thing at, where, the Pentagon?”

“Something like that. Yeah. Two months. It's exciting and terrifying”

“Of course. You leaning towards one more than the other?”

“I like how you're cutting to the chase Frederick, I have been thinking about it. Mostly I'm glad. A bit of normalisation? A bit of ordinary? And domestic? He's going to have some time at his own place in Baltimore, gradually build up, us staying there, him coming to us. See how we do.”

“Sounds sensible. I wanted to ask if the two of you wanted to come in?”

“Couples counselling?”

“Not quite. But in that territory. You're a smart man Will, you know lots of the areas where you struggle. I'm simply offering you some support in talking these over with someone you care about. He's army. There's going to be stuff there”

“DADT?”

“Of course. And how it's been for him, and being stationed abroad for a long time, and meeting someone with a child, whose wife was killed. And just trying to be real in a relationship normally conducted thousands of miles apart”

“I have no idea what appetite he has for the psychiatric. He was a medical doctor”

“I didn't know that. Where did he train?”

“John's Hopkins”

“Really? I wonder if we know people in common? I had no idea. Will, I'm not in any way forcing this. Just if it'd be helpful. Or after he's gone back. Just for you. You might even want to talk through stuff to do with Abigail. It's an adjustment for her”

“I've talked to her teacher. Abs has been getting some blow back at school. She told Hannibal but took some persuading by him to tell me. She did ‘show and tell’ and someone in the class picked up on the personal stuff and was an ill informed eight year old about it. Abigail got very anxious about how mommies and daddies worked if there was more than one daddy.”

“Ahh. Not so much fun for her to navigate.”

“She pinched him. Smacked someone else. Of course there was fall out from that. You may well be right that if Hannibal is here for longer she'll get more hassle. But we better face up to that. Thanks. You got a child specialist in mind?”

“If you or she needs it. But we may be able to do a sit down with you and her and the Colonel just to make sure you're all on the same page”

“Ok. I can see the point. Thanks Fred. And this came out of Jack worrying?”

“Not just Jack actually. I had dinner with Jimmy and Brian last week. They mentioned Hannibal would be coming over. It got me thinking. They also seemed pretty pleased.”

Will laughs,

“They do this very funny squaring up to him, like he's some puppy come into their territory!”

“Puppy? Really? That's not the impression I got”

“Wolf puppy not a little bitty Jack Russell like Buster”

“I’ve met your Buster”

Will grins,

“No one forgets him”

……

“Daddy? Did you send my card to Hannibal? For valtie day?”

Will continues to thread her arms into her coat, find her school bag, check it for lunch, add a juice box,

“Valentine’s Day. I did Abs. You know how the post is. We might get something back in time or we might not. He’ll still be thinking of us. He still loves us Abs.”

“With daddy Hannibal love?”

“He loves you with daddy Hannibal love. Spot on curlie girlie. And daddy Hannibal love is what?”

“‘As good as if not better than any kind of mommy and daddy love’?”

“Uh huh, you were paying attention then. Abs? Do you believe that?”

He finds her scarf and hat and she pulls the hat on and winds the scarf loopily round her neck,

“I think so. Clark says if he really loved us he would be here. But then I said he was coming here and Clark said it still wasn't proper.”

“Sweetheart, would you like Clark to meet Hannibal when he comes over, we can see what Clark thinks then? Mittens?”

She pulls them out of her pocket with an air of triumph,

“Miss Bloom told him he was ‘sadly mistaken’ she said if anyone else had any ideas that Hannibal wasn't a proper daddy they should come talk to her after story.”

“Did anyone?”

“I don't think so. Miss Bloom is going to ask him to come say hello and talk about Adopt a Soldier to the whole school”

She says this with an air of awe and trepidation. Will smiles, we all face our own fears. And they are all real.

“What about Sargeant Budge and Private Lass, should they come too?”

“Can Sargeant Budge call Hannibal Sir? Hannibal looks very bossy when he does that and Sargeant Budge rushes around. He looks at Hannibal like we look at Miss Bloom”

……..

Bev hands round cups of coffee. She's feeling a little bit buzzy about it all, especially the keep quiet bit. She hasn't even told preller which she is quietly very proud of herself for. She'll make sure they know how brilliant she was. After.

“Ok guys, plans for tomorrow? Jims what you two doing?”

“Tomorrow? Oh yeah. Brian? What are we doing?”

“Concert, meal, I've got tickets and booked a table”

Jimmy looks at Bev and grins,

“That's what we’re doing. You? Cassie? Will? Will, wake up? What are you doing for Valentine’s?”

“Sorry. Thinking. No, that's not what I'm doing. Abs and I are sitting for Bev and Molly, we’ve got Wally Jr so his dad can go out, Lily, so Bev’s sister can go out, and both of them together so Bev and Molly can go out. And Abs gets to spend the evening watching child appropriate films about friendship and kindness”

“Really? What you got planned”

“Hugo and Wall-e. We've seen Wall-e so many times I can quote whole stretches of dialogue”

Cassie frowns,

“Dr G, there aren't whole stretches of dialogue…. Oh I get it. That's funny”

They all smile. This is one of Will’s favourite movie jokes,

“Is Hugo any good?”

“I think so, made me cry”

“Awww, Will you are a softy”

“Core of steel. The exterior is misleading. Eight year olds do that to you. Bev what are you and Molly actually doing?”

“She doesn't know! Night in a fancy hotel. Spa morning, back for lunch with the kids and you, you know? Smooching, dancing, spa-ing, which Moll thinks is next to hell but she'll indulge me, and then enjoy it, and then be a bit annoyed because I was right, and then punish me for being right”

Bev smiles very happily and the others grin at her landscape of smug. Will laughs,

“I'm happy to collude. Cassie? What plans have you got? Did I see that red head guy again last week. He seems nice”

“Red head? Oh! We're not dating, no, that's my brother Nick. No. Ha. He's going out with his girlfriend. I don't have specific plans”

She doesn't add anything and Brian smiles at her,

“Take notes kiddo, these are all top Valentine's Day plans, surprise spa day, surprise gig and dinner, and mind your friend's kids. One of these plans is not like the others.”

Will laughs, and shoulder checks him,

“You're such a shit Brian, I kind of love you”

Jimmy leans over,

“Oy, Hands off. My toy”

There's a mock tussle with Brian sitting between Jimmy and Will and Will and Jimmy both pulling him by the arm. Will lets Jimmy win.

“I just want you to be clear I let you win then Jimmy Price. Brian is a worthy prize! But you frighten me more”

There's a lot of laughter. Jimmy is not frightening. Except possibly where Brian is concerned.

……..

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 31

Chapter Summary

Valentine's Day Part 1

Hannibal lets himself into his Baltimore home and drops his duffel in the hallway. It's been a while.

The agency he uses has un-draped the furniture, stocked his fridge with the basics, cleaned up after the last temporary tenants, a visiting Classics professor and her partner, and put the heating on low and aired the rooms. It feel both like home and utterly alien. Too long really.

In the sitting room he switches on the audio system so there's a low hum, he opens the cd tray, still one in there, Beethoven. Good enough. He clicks play and Symphony number 7 in A major filters out of the speakers. He clicks the switch that will play the music in the dining room and kitchen as well as in here. Looks around. Imagines how it shall feel to have both Will and Abigail here. And the dogs!

In the kitchen he makes some tea. It's not impossibly late but he'd like to sleep some tonight so as to surprise Will with someone not utterly exhausted. The fridge has milk, butter, some decent cheeses and pate. Some secret Nutella. In the cupboards are a range of dried goods. There's also some fruit and vegetables. And eggs. Maybe an omelette? Back in the fridge there's a jar of black truffles. And some good mushrooms. And some sharp cured ham. Italian, not Spanish, though chorizo would be interesting.

Another half an hour and Hannibal is eating a simple omelette, well, simple by his standards. Of course on base he never gets to cook, but he enjoys it, may even be good at it. He glances at the herb wall. Looking a bit tired. It often does in the winter. But the gardening firm he uses do their best. He looks up at the Boucher above the fireplace. It's a beautiful piece but maybe not the best thing for Abigail. Zeus incarnated as a swan attempting the assault on Leda? She's already working through two daddies. One of the daddies is also a swan? Bit much. He'll take it down.

He pulls out a note pad from a pocket, and a pen. Starts a list of things that need to be done around the house, for Abigail. And Will. And the dogs.

……..

In one of the spare bedrooms Hannibal looks again at his watch. He might just have got slightly over enthusiastic about re-arranging things. Another half an hour and he must stop or all his careful timings will be for nought.

The Japanese shunga has come down, especially the octopi. The horns have been put away, except for the pair in the master bedroom. He's taken down a few of the more depressing paintings, which in the end is eight of them. In the living room alone. He considers the house with new eyes. It's still beautiful, but perhaps a little desiccated and dour. And maybe an external symptom of his internal workings. The colours are still good, and what can you do with your grandmother’s nineteenth

century nightmare furniture? And China, and cutlery. Oh and the glassware. He looks up at the light fittings. Maybe an antler chandelier is a bit much. With the antler Christmas tree. If that's what it is, he's never been sure.

Still, the bonsai are thriving.

……..

Will hums to himself, a small package arrived this morning which Abigail will find when she actually gets downstairs for breakfast.

“Abs? Running out of breakfast time. Allons y curly girlie! Heart shaped waffle if you're quick”

“Daddy, daddy, I'm here, I'm here! Kiss a bientot kitty!”

“Happy Valentine’s Day a bientot kitty, je t’aime beaucoup ma petite chat. Tu est tres joli et intelligent”

“Daddy! I love you. Thank you for the waffles. Can I have jelly?”

“Sure thing, have you seen? Packet for you?”

“From Hannibal?”

“Oh, my, you have some other admirer in the US army? My oh my, I think I should be told these things Abs.”

She wriggles and giggles and opens the mailer,

“Card for you. Card for me and present for me! What about you daddy?”

“Hannibal said he'd send something by courier, I'm hoping for a huge bouquet bigger than my head”

“That big!”

“Thanks for that. You going to open it?”

She does, inside is a small heart shaped locket that opens into three with a picture of her in the middle, Hannibal and Will on either side clearly looking at her in a pictures that's been cut up into three parts. Will rolls his eyes. God. The competition. She is such a fan-girl for Hannibal already. And fuck off to the kids at school.

“Can I wear it if I'm careful?”

“What will Miss Bloom say?”

“Only if I keep it inside my shirt”

“No games today?”

“Not on a Thursday”

“Alright then. Do you want me to do it up for you?”

She nods and they spend a few minutes making sure it's secure. Hannibal must have got a short chain as it hits her just below her throat. Pretty. Will smiles. How bloody amazing to have a partner and daughter who like each other. Love each other.

“Ok. Waffly good Abs, eat up, Buster is looking hopeful. Batter is bad for him”

He distracts the dogs and rubs their ears, his face down beside them. Such lovely boys. Such life-saving lovely loving beautiful boys. Who kept him company, kept him as close to sane as he is, who kept him warm, who kept him alive. Good dogs.

“Ok, when you're done we've stuff for the day, have you got your stuff for tonight in the hall Abs?”

“Everything except Godzilla?”

“He's in the wash. I've put Fox on the table next to the front door. Ok?”

“Ok. Thank you”

“Good to go apart from that?”

“Have you got the dvds?”

“Good reminder, I'll go check. What flowers do you think Hannibal might send?”

Miss Bloom has been living up to her name recently and telling them a story about flowers and flower fairies and the language of flowers. He suspects Hannibal might get a few cards and letters with secret flower codes. He’ll have to give him a heads up. Though maybe Abs will cut out the cards and just give Hannibal flower presents. When he gets here.

God. When he gets here. The date is still a bit vague, but, maybe soon. Awesome. Maybe quite soon? Sargeant Budge keeps apologising for not being clearer. As if Will really cares.

……..

“Jimmy what the hell has Brian done to the guy in drawer eight?”

“There isn't a guy in drawer eight?”

“That's what I mean. Where is he?”

“I thought you got all the larvae?”

“I did. I'm looking for pupal crust, in cavities and shit”

“Lovely. I'll ask him. Brian. BRIAN?”

“Why does everyone shout in this lab? Where's the Fire?”

“Where's the guy from drawer eight?”

“Drawer six, better drainage”

“Oh. Ok. Thanks. Did you label it?”

Brian looks at him,

“Ok sorry. I didn't read it”

“Do you want coffee or tea I'm going to make some. Hey did your flowers come yet?”

Cassie looks up from her station and looks hard at Dr Zeller, she thinks it's very unkind that everyone teases Dr Graham like this.

“Yeah, funny man. You'd know if they had. Bigger than your head Brian! Bigger!”

“In your dreams Will. So, tea?”

“Please. Cassie? You want something? The lovely Dr Zeller is making”

“Coffee please Dr Z, cream, half a sugar”

“Sure thing, Will where's Bev?”

“Jack. Some urgent thing I dunno. She didn't say. I didn't ask. I'm smart like that”

Brian grins. Yeah, right. Sometimes. And hell isn't it just great that Will is a bit happier at the moment? Gotta be good. Flowers huh? He could get some on the way home. For Jimmy. He'd laugh but be really pleased. Yeah. Plan.

A little later, maybe an hour, Will looks down into his paper cup of tea. He has no actual recollection of drinking it. Damn. No one else in the lab either to whine at about it. Alright, he can make his own damn tea.

In the tiny cubby hole they call a staff break room Cassie is there, oh, her brother, ok, Will can at least say hi.

“Cassie, hello, is this Nick. Hey Nick, I'm Will Graham, in effect Cassie’s boss because most of the time we all wander around in a haze of uncertainty and gore. Nice to meet you.”

He's about to stick out a hand and then realises maybe not, not with the nitrile gloves and all. He peels them off and drops them into the bio-haz bin just outside the door.

“You're Dr Graham?”

“Sure. I'm just making tea. You want some? Cassie?”

They both shake their heads and Will gets on with making a cup, they're both quiet, when he's done he smiles vaguely at them,

“Ok then, bye Nick, Cassie, I've got some pupa states for you to catalaogue when you're done. No rush. Thanks”

He goes back into the lab aware that behind him they've started to talk again, maybe a little more heatedly, Bev comes in and stands beside him, leaning on a bench,

“Is that tea on your lab coat Will? You should change it. Don't contaminate anything?”

He looks down,

“Must be. Stupid of me. I'll drink this cup and then go do it.”

“What they arguing about in there?”

“No idea. Cassie’s brother Nick. Something I guess”

They half listen for a sec when Nick pushes through the door and comes into the lab, Bev is up straight away,

“Woahh. Guy. Back out. No one without a badge in here”

“I just want to say to your colleague I think you are a fucking shit! Treating her like this? For fuck’s sake? Valentine's Day. You're a fucking arsehole man”

“Nick! Don't, please, don't!”

“Shut up Cass, if you won't say anything I will. You're a shit Dr fucking Graham. I should smack you”

He makes a start towards Will and Will makes no bones about it and ducks behind the bench,

“Mr Boyle I'm very sorry but I have no..”

“SORRY, not sorry enough though? What you gonna do, screw her and screw her over?”

Bev blinks at Will, at Cassie, at Nick,

“Wait up? Cassie? What the ACTUAL FUCK!!!”

“I didn't say anything! It's not my fault”

When Brian and Jimmy come through the door with files and lab results and clipboards they dump them down and weigh in fast. Will keeps a bench between him and Nicholas Boyle who looks seriously furious now. Cassie might be crying and Bev is having none of it.

The lab door opens and Jack bellows,

“What the actual fuck? Guys? What the hell is this?”

There's a lull in the shouting, Nick turns to Jack angrily,

“Your fucking bug guy is fucking my sister and treating her like shit”

Everyone blinks in surprise, Jimmy manages,

“Really? Wow, that's pretty unlikely”

Hannibal steps into the room from behind Jack,

“I should say so”

There’s a five second pause, Will with his mouth dropping open in surprise is distracted and Nick takes the opening to dart round the bench and thwack him on the nose, it starts to bleed.

“Fuck! That actually hurt? What the? Hannibal!”

“Happy Valentine's day Will”

“Where are my flowers you bastard? Owww. My nose is bleeding. Owww. For fuck’s sake”

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 32

Chapter Summary

Valentine's Day Part 2

Chapter Notes

There's NSFW in here...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal steps over to Will and presses a handkerchief to his nostrils, pinches them lightly, he smooths Will's hair back with his other hand, Will rests one of his hands on Hannibal's waist, the other over the hand at his nose faintly glad his glasses were on his head and not his face,

"Your flowers are in Agent Crawford's office. To avoid pollen contamination. And may I say they acted better than a pass at the front desk. Everyone seems to know you're hoping for flowers. I'm glad not to disappoint. Brian could we have some ice. Beverly, no, maybe Jimmy? This young person may need a handkerchief or something medicinal. Jack, would you like to deal with this other young person? In just a moment. Young man? I think you believe yourself provoked, hit Will again and I shall be. That won't end well. Will my love? I'm sorry. That didn't quite go as I'd meant."

"I honestly don't care. Or I won't. This is fantastic. God, I'm so glad to see you."

He moves a little, but Bev grabs at his arm,

"Not in the lab! Think of the fluids!"

Hannibal snorts and then there's laughter and the tension is broken. Jimmy cuddles Cassie out of the room. Nick is beginning to realise he might have made an absolute whopper of a mistake, he looks at Jack,

"Agent Crawford, err, I might have got the wrong end of the stick?"

"Yeah, you might. This is Colonel Lecter, Will's partner, who, well, the uniform is a bit of a give away. Posted overseas usually which is why we never see him here normally and clearly Will doesn't talk about him enough, which is frankly not my experience at all of the situation but whatever. Will, piss off out of the lab, bleed somewhere else, my office, get your flowers while you're at it. They're enormous. Don't anyone take a picture, Bella will kill me. Hannibal, I'm glad to meet you at last. Folks? Show's over."

…….

It's like bees to a honey pot, or indeed flowers, Will thinks. They sit in Jack's office, Hannibal with a casual arm round Will's shoulder, both half sitting and leaning against Jack's desk, Jimmy and Brian laughing, Bev keeping up a commentary on how great the pics would have been, Will's nose no longer bleeding, and him just pressed into the curve of Hannibal's side. They all have tea or coffee. Jack has had a long possibly slightly paternal conversation with Cassie and Nick. He's sitting to one side of his desk also laughing now. Will smiles to himself, he still has no clue how this came to pass. He'll get that out of Hannibal later.

"I was supposed to wait until this evening, come to Beverley's place, surprise them there. But I found myself awake and moderately alert and this evening seemed a long way off."

"We're still sitting for the kids though. But maybe this afternoon? I dunno, Jack? Can I take the afternoon? Actually that's a bit over three hours until school's out. We said six right Bev?"

Bev starts to laugh, quite a lot,

"Oh I am just the best. Really. The best. Will, sweetie, you're not kid sitting! We've got Abs, you're doing, actually I have no idea what you're doing, but it's a school night! You idiot! She's with us and we'll get her off to school tomorrow morning. Lily's coming over the weekend, as is Wally. Not tonight. Jeez."

"But that would mean you knew about.. you utter shits."

Jimmy and Brian throw their hands up,

"Woah!! Not us. No idea at all!"

Jack looks guilty.

"Jack? Not you too?"

"Maybe. So that you could have tomorrow off?"

Will looks at Hannibal,

"You idiot. Your fucking present is probably in some postal bag, I don't know, in the Middle East or somewhere!"

Hannibal nods happily,

"And yet I do not care at all. Will you collect your belongings then we can go and sort out one or two things and then collect Abigail?"

"From school? Oh she will love you! Seriously! Wait, you didn't tell Miss Bloom did you? Hannibal? Did you? For fuck's sake!"

……..

In the car Will discovers he can't stop grinning or asking questions, in the end he's quietened when Hannibal reaches over and rests a hand on his thigh,

"So, if we go to my house in Baltimore first you can say what else needs to be done to make it Abigail and Buster friendly. I have confidence in you and Winston not to create havoc. Actually, I

have confidence in Winston. Would that be alright? We might then go and collect Abigail. Or the dogs first if that is easier. Yes?"

"Sure. What. You mean for the whole weekend? Wow. Plus the dogs. To your house. Ok. I'm still adjusting to this. This is.. "

"In a good way?"

"In a good way Hannibal. In a very good way. I can't even begin to describe how glad I am that you're here."

"Can you pull over onto the side for a moment?"

"On the I95? Ok, next rest stop"

A few minutes later Will pulls off the road and into a slightly depressing truck stop.

"What is it?"

Hannibal leans over and lays a hand of his face and pulls Will towards him, and kisses him. And kisses him. At a truck stop. Damn thinks Will, car park five, bay six? And this truck stop? Hannibal, perhaps, is thinking something similar?

"Home?"

"Yeah. I'm on it"

……..

"Hannibal, don't take this the wrong way, but your house is hilarious? What were you thinking? Wait! Is this the crazy furniture you mentioned? Do you want me to go round and traffic light sticker it?"

Hannibal looks a question at him,

"Red sticker, 'no way on earth', Yellow sticker, 'maybe', Green sticker, 'I like this better than what I have at home', works pretty well. Though there's a fair amount of red sticker here."

"You may be surprised to know I've already moved some things"

Will laughs, Hannibal isn't entirely offended but is perhaps a little surprised. He looks round the living room again. Really? That bad?

"Have you got a room for Abs? Can we see?"

Hannibal draws him upstairs by the hand and shows Will the small room with attached bathroom he thinks might suit Abigail.

"Alright?"

"God, she'll love this! What is this? This has a name doesn't it?"

"Toil de jouy. I'm sorry it's not pink"

“No, no, green is good. Are the cupboards built in? Oh wow they are. Extra good. And it's a great bed. I'll rent ‘bedknobs and broomsticks’ for her. She will seriously love this. Oh, does that open? Is it a drop down? Wow. Oh Hannibal she will seriously adore this. Oh love. Thank you”

Hannibal smiles. All he'd had to do in here was move a particularly depressing engraving of Hannibal the Grim and empty a small bookcase beside the bed. Perhaps it needs a small armchair in the corner. There's a Lloyd Loom somewhere in the house that should suit.

“Would you like to see what could be our room? If you like it well enough?”

Will smiles, suddenly feeling a tiny bit shy.

…….

“Can you take the strain a little more? Just lean a little further”

“Fuck, you need to, just, push harder, fuck, oh my god”

“I think it's stuck. Damn. Can you move?”

“I think I'm stuck too. How did you get it in?”

“I feel like maybe the room was built round it?”

Will leans hard against the armoire. He's seriously regretting suggesting they move it. It's just that the corner it sits in would be perfect for the full length mirror from Hannibal's dressing room.

“Can you grab my hand and I'll just climb over this bit of it… ok…. Thanks”

Hannibal pulls Will to him and they both laugh.

“Perhaps I shall ask a carpenter to come and look at it?”

“Usually someone knows how these old bits of furniture unjoint. There's often a trick to it. I'm sorry about the mirror”

“We can always move it later”

Will smiles up at him,

“I kinda hoped we'd do a bit of trial and error now? I reckon we've about an hour before we need to go? What do you think?”

“I think very much yes. So, this room? Will it do?”

Hannibal pulls away a little and takes a more critical look round the room, Will follows his line of sight, thinks about it a little,

“I like it actually. It's a lot more masculine than my place, or differently so. I like it. A few pictures of dogs, maybe a fish ornament or two”

“You are quite terrible, why should I want to live with you”

“Because you love me?”

“That could be it. Because I love you. Come here Will”

“Are you going to do your all commanding voice on me, like in the lab with that kid?”

“I hadn't planned to. Does it work?”

“I'm more likely to laugh to be honest, but I could see it was effective, everyone jumped.”

“You'd be more likely to jump if you hadn't also seen me in rather more vulnerable situations I suspect.”

“Oh, with your cock in my mouth do you mean”

Hannibal swallows,

“Quite possibly.”

They look at one another then, and slowly both of them smile.

“Take of your jacket Hannibal……. Good..And the rest”

They both undress, watching but not touching the other, Will pushes back the covers on the bed and sits down.

“The nsfw letter you sent? The one I opened at work?”

Hannibal sits down beside him and begins to stroke Will’s hair back from his face, kisses him on the corner of his mouth,

“You called me ‘babe’ in the reply, I snorted my breakfast in the officer's mess. And then couldn't explain to a colleague why I'd dribbled corn flakes down my fatigues. Yes? What about it? You haven't drawn me it yet?”

“It's in the Valentine's parcel. So I really hope it doesn't get lost. Could we, maybe, do that later?”

“Would you like to?”

“Not if it would make you uncomfortable?”

“It wouldn't. I'd enjoy it. With you. It's not something I've done before”

Will stares at him,

“No one has fucked you? What the hell is wrong with them?”

“It's never been suggested. I imagine I appear somewhat more, I'm not sure, stereotypically likely to be the penetrator”

“Ok, apart from calling it that. That's just ridiculous. Why shouldn’t you? Enjoy it. God. You're amazingly good at it, but, I'd love to fuck you. I wasn't sure if you'd like it at all until I read your letter. Hey, can I… can I do the other stuff too?”

“Do you want to?”

“Do you want me to?”

“Not if you're uncomfortable”

“Hannibal, ok. I'd say if I was. I want that, with you, ok. God. But I want to take my time. I want you to be saturated with pleasure from it. This bed is perfect too”

“Oh? How so?”

“Ok, we're gonna practice. On me, obviously. Have you got lube?”

Hannibal retrieves it and then watches as Will hops off the bed round to the foot and leans with his arms extended forwards on the wooden bar across the foot of the bed. He spreads his feet apart, leaning forwards, so his cock hangs down between his legs.

“Ok, we’re out of time for some of what I'd like right now, but that's ok you can make it up to me later. Right now? I'm going to show what can be done with a ridiculous bed with a goddam wooden frame. You must have used these for something? Really?”

Hannibal shakes his head,

“I came home one time to find someone had left a long silk scarf tied to one of the posts”

“Tell me you've got silk scarves?”

“I don't think I do”

“We can improvise. Not now. Later. Come here?”

Hannibal smiles and moves closer to Will, Will lifts one hand off the bed rail and pulls Hannibal's face to his,

“Kiss me, I want fingers, then I want you to fuck me, and I'm not going to come. I'm going to hold off, save it for later. For you. Alright”

Hannibal smiles, it's fairly unusual for Will to be so assertive in the bedroom,

“Yes, very alright. Kiss me some more whilst I touch you”

He reaches round a hand and begins to stroke Will’s cock, after a few minutes their kisses become rather less focussed and rather wetter, and Will has hardened in Hannibal's grip, he asks around the kiss,

“Fingers, please, in me, please”

Hannibal collects the lubrication from the bed and liberally costs the fingers on both hands.

“My lovely Will, at the same time?”

“Yeah. I'll tell you when to stop.”

“Alright. You're leaking already”

“I know. You just… oh god exactly like that”

Hannibal slowly and carefully uses one finger to push against Will's hole, and uses his other hand to continue a slow pull and twist on his cock, he breathes against Will's hair, his head resting there, his own body leaning close against Will, his cock hard now, also leaking a little from the tip, against Will's hip,

"We're gonna get your carpet filthy"

"Good. I shall look at it and know we both used it well. And anyway it's your carpet too in effect."

He carries on. Will breathes heavier, just occasionally Hannibal grazes his prostate and he tries very hard not to jerk too much. The experience is overwhelming, especially as Hannibal is practically square on to him, not behind him, and can catalogue every movement or reaction on Will's face. And respond. Just occasionally he reaches down with a hand to stay Hannibal's hand on his cock. It's getting harder to stave off. Hannibal adds a second finger just when Will is keeping his other hand still, he makes a high pitched noise,

"Still alright?"

Hannibal kisses him behind his ear, licks a little there, Will shudders,

"No more hands, just, fuck, hold my waist, I'll lean again, properly this time"

Hannibal smiles against his neck,

"Fuck you and finish in you"

"Can you?"

"I have no doubt. Can you hold off"

"Help me?"

"Is that what you want?"

"Not usually. But today, tonight. I want to make it good for you. Actually, I want it to be good for both of us. Ok, I think I'm solid"

Hannibal pushes in and wonders if Will has any idea of what this feels like, if it's something he's done, he shys away from that thought, later, they'll experience this together, identically differently.

"I won't be long, I'm already…"

He stops talking and they both hold on, Will to the bar across the bed, Hannibal to Will. He's right. It's not long at all. But they have to stop twice to enable Will to catch himself, calm down, stop writhing back against Hannibal. At the finish they're both gasping and a little shocked by the added thrill of tension and anticipation it's fired between them. Hannibal pulls Will to the bed.

"Just breathe with me. That was.."

"Intense?"

"Intense."

Chapter End Notes

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Sorry for slow posting of Part 2 - slightly crappy migraine day. But ta da! Part 3 of Valentine's Day coming tomorrow...

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 33

Chapter Summary

Valentine's Day Part 3

Chapter Notes

I'm so sorry this is short, hopefully more tonight. I've still got the migraine from hell and we're now out of the Bed and Brekfast for the day and I'm in a Cafe with minimum wifi so I'm posting something now in case I can't until much later.

Thank you for all the kind words and brilliant support. Readers and commenters and kudosers. You rock!

I'm going to be slow answering comments for the next 24 hours probably. We won't get back to Cardiff until late and I might be a bit Wobblies by then. Ok, borrrring, on with the fic.

This is SFW - flipping later!

Miss Bloom looks around the classroom and glances at the clock on the back wall,

“Abigail?”

She beckons, Abigail looks up from the story about two daffodils she is trying to write. They are best friend daffodils though one is all yellow and one is yellow and white. She gets up and comes to the front, she tries not to hold onto her locket, she's already been reminded to put it away once. Hopefully she's not in any trouble.

“Abigail, no need to be worried, there's a surprise for you in a few minutes, can you try not to squeak too much do you think?”

Abigail nods. There is nothing she's expecting? It's puzzling, she has a little frown to herself.

……

Buster is sufficiently over excited that it takes five minutes to catch him. In the end Will makes Hannibal sit in the car with Winston. When both dogs are settled in the back and Will has brought some extra things for the weekend for him and Abigail he settles back into the driver's seat and laughs,

“He couldn't work out who was the pack alpha any more! You're a challenger for that status! Hilarious.”

Hannibal laughs,

“And Winston?”

“She knows the score”

“We can work on that”

“Buster or Winston?”

The car journey is light but not without its moments. Hannibal finds the question of Will’s sexual history has poked at something inside. He looks out of the window and tries to be casual when he asks,

“When you came to my parent’s home you mentioned you didn't really date. Before Margot, and I know that's so after. I'm singularly undesirous about knowing about any men who have had a place in your heart but have there been? It's, not exactly bothered me, but I would say I'm curious”

“Before you? There hasn't been anyone. I've felt passing connection to one or two men, but it's never gone beyond something more like interest and an enjoyment of their company. I like Jimmy, I like Brian, there's a guy in one of the other labs I like. But there's nothing deeper there. It's friendship. Good friends. I'm lucky with my friends.”

“Will, I feel like I'm overstepping slightly, what's your sexual experience with men then?”

Will laughs,

“Overstepping? Hardly! And, also, actual experience, before you? Zero. Hey don't sweat it, Margot and I had sex precisely, or rather, imprecisely, four times before Abigail was conceived. I don't have a vast lexicon of comparators, you're doing great!”

Hannibal turns and watches him driving, he feels a sweep of warmth and tenderness he almost doesn't know how to deploy. He wants to submerge Will in a sea of desire and love and care. He tries to get a handle on the emotion he suspects his voice will carry,

“I wouldn't have known. You're a generous and passionate lover. I'm a little overwhelmed this is how it has been for you, and concerned,”

“I did say it had been pretty bleak. But, I've got friends. Bev hugs me, so does Molly. Brian does this sweet thing of putting his hand on my shoulder like a true bro, Jimmy cuddles me some, if Brian's in the room! Abigail is all over hug. She is a hug made human. And the dogs! Wow. Full on swarming.”

“Will, you're a physical person, even with the synesthesia. Have you thought about it?”

“I've jerked off plenty. Not really to porn, there's no connection and I can't really get it on without. But just thinking, sometimes. And your letters are incandescent! Awesome. The drawing too. Brilliant. It's helped so much. Really. And you know Fred offered some supporting ‘conversations’, we can work it out”

“Will, I’m more concerned about you, your happiness. I'm aware we’re close to Abigail's school. Could we talk about this some more later?”

“Sure Hannibal. I know. It's a bit weird, I am”

“You're not, you've just worked with what was there. But, well, I'm what's here now. I want you to really believe that”

Will smiles at him and indicates into the turn that will take them to the school,

“I'm still having trouble believing you're here right now! It's alright Hannibal. I've had a lot of time to learn to be me, I'll learn you, us, as well. Meanwhile. And this is an almost impossible question. Are you ready for this?”

……

The class look at Hannibal with awe. Abigail might burst if she looks any prouder. Hannibal smiles at her as he says,

“Some of you have seen me before by Skype, how many of you here have a solider you adopted?”

Most of the class put their hand up,

“That's very kind of you. And some of you were at Abigail's birthday last year? And we waved at you, who was that so I can tell your soldiers back at base?”

Almost all the class put their hand up again, Will is especially amused by Clark looking very definite about his presence at the party.

“That's very good. Thank you. Now, I think Miss Bloom told you I'm a Colonel. Can anyone tell you who's my very top boss?”

There are a few tentative hands,

“Thank you, lad over there, stand up please, good, at ease,”

Clark relaxes a little which mostly means he's no longer on tip toes,

“What's your name then?”

“Clark Ingram..” he slides for a micro second “Sir”

Both Miss Bloom and Will suppress a smile, Hannibal however smiles at the little boy,

“Very good Clark, so who is my very top boss?”

“It's the President, Sir”

“It is, well done, you can sit down again. Can anyone tell me what his military title is?”

They carry on like this for a little with some too and fro between Hannibal and the class. Then he opens up the floor for questions,

“Have you got any medals?”

“How long have you been a Soldier?”

“Is anyone else in your family a solider? I mean Soldier, sorry”

“Are you American, cos you don't sound it?”

“Abigail says you don't live here usually, are you on holiday?”

Hannibal lobs each of these back with ease,

“In a few weeks time I'm going to bring two of my colleagues with me and we'll do something for the whole school and something for this class especially. We’ll even wear our smart uniforms. Does anyone know what these are called?”

There's a chorus of “fatigues” and Hannibal quietly marvels and is simultaneously sad at how ubiquitous military language is in the vernacular of eight year olds. Hopefully the language is as close as any of them will ever get. But he smiles,

“You've been very welcoming, thank you. I'm especially grateful because I get to be Abigail's other daddy. Some of you know Dr Graham?”

On the sidelines with Miss Bloom Will sketches a wave at the class and smiles,

“He works for the federal bureau of investigation. The FBI, this means that he looks after people's safety here in the US and I look after people outside of our country. So we're a perfect team of daddies. I know some of you don't have two daddies, some of you have a mommy and daddy, or a mommy, or a daddy, or a carer or foster, or two mommies, or a grandmother. Can I just say if you've a foster, my own father used to say that if you were fostered you'd been chosen. My sister and I thought it was the greatest honour when he said that as well as us being his biological children he'd choose us too. That was very exciting for us. Some of you probably have brothers and sisters? Yes? Yes. I've a younger sister. But Abigail is my only little girl. I'm very lucky. You're her friends? I think I'm lucky to get to be her daddy. What do you think?”

There are an awful lot of nods and Miss Bloom leans in to Will and whispers,

“I think he nailed it?”

……..

The car journey back to Baltimore has to be halted for the dogs to run around. They have a repeat of the Buster incident. In the end Will has to push Hannibal into sitting on a bench and keep his hand on his shoulder and then ignore him for Buster to get a clue. Abigail watches in amusement. When they're back in the car she asks,

“Is daddy in charge still?”

Will snorts but Hannibal says,

“He is Abi. Your daddy is utterly in charge.”

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 34

Chapter Summary

Valentine's Day Part 4

Still SFW!!! They got wordy!

The dogs are definitely bemused by the house. Abigail is both entranced and spends quite a considerable time looking and frowning. Occasionally she asks Will what something is and if she can touch things. Will suggests she asks Hannibal and gets on with reading a book on the history of the Silk Road and drinking tea.

She likes her room and after exploring thoroughly and arranging her things as she likes she follows Winston down the hall to the big bedroom, Hannibal is in there putting away the contents of his duffel bag. She knocks on the door and he beckons her in and points at one of the armchairs in front of the fireplace, she climbs into it and wiggles until she is comfortable,

“I like my room. Thankyou very much”

He smiles and watches her out of the corner of his eye as he puts socks into a drawer all neatly rolled up,

“Is there anything else you need in there?”

“Could I have a little light for beside the bed? Sometimes I get worried? At night?”

“What a good idea, it'll save you from having to wear a head torch to bed to read”

She smiles and runs a finger down the braiding on the side of the velvet covered chair,

“Can I have a new lampshade too? Please?”

“I cannot for the life of me recall what the current one is like. What would you like? Is it going to be Hello Kitty?”

“Not everything is!”

He makes like he is having a small heart attack, or she has stabbed him in the front as he clasps his hands to his chest, and she giggles,

“Could I have something that looks like a balloon in the sky?”

“A balloon in the sky?”

“There're some on the walls”

“Oh, a hot air balloon. I'm sure we could manage that. We could always use a paper globe and attach a little basket underneath it. If we can't find one. How would that be?”

She nods and smiles, and twiddles the braiding some more, ah, something else then, he stops what he's doing, closes the drawers and comes and sits on the chair across from her,

“So, Abigail, I expect you have some things about the house you would like to know?”

She nods and sticks her bottom lip out, it's not a pout or a sulk, Hannibal considers her lexicon of facial expressions. Oh, it's a big question face.

“Did we agree you could asks pretty well anything and I would answer if I could?”

“Unless it was private or a secret you couldn't tell?”

“That's right”

He waits as she wriggles a bit more, and wrinkles her nose up,

“Is daddy going to stay here too?”

“In the house, or in this room?”

“Here”

“Yes, he’ll stay here too”

She makes a face,

“Come over here and tell me what you're worried about?”

He pats his knee and she climbs off her own chair and comes and clambers onto his lap, she leans against him, a little curled up,

“Am I allowed to come and snuggle if I'm scared?”

“Is that what you do normally?”

She almost whispers,

“I get scared a lot. Daddy does too sometimes so I snuggle him. Sometimes the dogs as well”

“I think Buster and Winston will definitely snuggle you on your bed, we’ll see if we can fit all five of us in here. But definitely you. You'll fit I think? What do you think? Is it big enough?”

She looks over at the bed,

“It's quite high up”

“Would you like me to get a step stool so you can climb up without having to jump?”

“Yes please. Do I have to knock?”

“If all the lights are off and everyone is asleep you absolutely don't have to knock, you can come in, you don't have to wait for one of us to wake up. Would you like us to leave the door open for a bit until you're used to sleeping here?”

She nods,

“Should I knock sometimes?”

“Can you remember what you did when Mommy was with you?”

“Not very well. If the door was shut and the light was on or there was talking I always knocked. That's what I do at Bev and Mollys house too. Especially if they're giggling. Then I have to knock”

Hannibal is rather charmed by this as a solution, and giggling! There will be giggling if he can coax Will to it.

“Well done for remembering. That's a while ago now.”

“I've forgotten lots of things”

“What's the best thing you do remember?”

She considers,

“Breakfast with waffles and honey and jelly. We had that this morning because of Valentine's Day. Oh. I forgot. Daddy will say I'm rude. Thank you for my present! Miss Bloom let me wear it inside my collar”

“That seems very sensible then you can't lose it”

“I like it….”

She pauses again,

“Did you mean it about being another daddy?”

He rubs his nose against the side of her face, dryly,

“I meant it with all my heart. But your daddy has been practising for a long time at being a daddy. I'm very new to it. I will make lots of mistakes. Hopefully you and Will won't get too annoyed with how bad I am at it sometimes”

She gives him an incredulous look, he's about to warn her that he will mess up at some point and then reconsiders. Might that just worry her? It'd be an easy thing to say and he'd mean it lightly, but she might take it more seriously.

“Personally I think it's alright to get something wrong. You don't always know it's wrong until you've done it. Then you find out, and if you're lucky you can do something different the next time. That's what we'll do. If any of us get something wrong we'll try and get it right the next time. Or we'll just set Buster on it? What do you think?”

“Buster is wrong!”

“Maybe he'll get a second chance then too?”

“Not if he doesn't do what daddy says. Then there will be trouble. Can we have something to eat before we go to Bev’s?”

“I should think so, shall we find your daddy and ask him about it? Have you asked everything you wanted to ask?”

She rubs her face against his neck, in a gesture which is remarkably like Will, she whispers

“You do love us don't you?”

Ahh, still worried. Not surprising. He's been here precisely, oh, less than 24 hours.

“Yes, lovely girl. I do”

……..

“She asked about the room arrangements, if she was allowed into our room and under what circumstances she is allowed to snuggle, she made a bid on behalf of the dogs too, she checked about really meaning it about being a daddy, and wanted reassurance that I loved you both”

“Ok. Don't hold back Abigail! I think that's all good? Any surprise answers you want to warn me about.”

He signals, pulls out from the slip road, and joins another lane of cars, back to Baltimore, again,

“Did I overdo it in class?”

“You utterly got it spot on. For Abs, all the kids really. And me. Thank you. I like the whole double-daddies-sorry-not-all-of-you-have-that, never mind”

“Oh dear. That smug?”

“Fantastically. They all loved it. You could tell!”

“And you?”

“Hannibal, every time you say something publicly that shows you want to be with us, or with me? Just makes me feel, well, pretty great! Really! The whole wanted, loved, kind of owned business. I know some people hate that stuff. But honestly, I've yearned for it. Someone not, I don't know, embarrassed? By my individual peculiarities and collective weirdness? It's amazing. What do most of want in life? To be seen, understood and still accepted for who we really are? Unbelievable. I wasn't sure I'd even get a glimpse of it. And I can tell you're thinking mushy thoughts. Good. I love you being mushy. I'm playing for mush here”

“And deflecting slightly?”

“Perfect. You're beginning to detect my patterns. Yes of course deflecting a bit. In case I'm wrong. Bit of self preservation”

“I won't say you’re unwise to invest in self preservation. But ultimately I hope you will accept love between us simply as your due”

Will glances over at him in the passenger seat,

“That's kind of you. Maybe. But it works both ways”

“Tell me what you mean”

“I think you've not had enough love either. You're a giver, maybe a rescuer too, and I suspect people have done a whole lot of taking and not always giving back. The professional bit probably didn't help. You just do look amazingly competent. So if the classroom had been the other way round? I'd be laying claim to you double quick. You get me along to some Army dinner and I'll be exceedingly territorial”

Hannibal smiles ‘exceedingly territorial’,

“I see you smiling, that's the terminology not the sentiment. I think? Isn't it?”

“It is. I suspect I'd be glad to know you'd be jealous.”

“Yeah. I would. Don't go there. Ok?”

“I wouldn't. I'm not interested in those kind of games. In some ways I am rather humourless”

Will tries not to make a face and Hannibal looks shocked,

“I’ll have you know some people think me very amusing!”

“What people? I'll check you know! I know, sorry. I'm just teasing. But thank you. I don't really get the whole make someone jealous on purpose thing. At least I don't think so. It just seems hurtful, to the target and the person being used. Very unfair.”

“What was the thing with the young man earlier?”

“So much has happened today. And that definitely wasn't to make you jealous? Oh, you know that. Of course. Bev said something a bit ago, I thought she was, I don't know, teasing maybe, or poking, or something, she said Cassie had a thing for me. I just laughed it off. Cassie works hard, she does what she's supposed to, she's reliable. She's great. She's the intern I mentioned who'll get a credit in the next edition of the monograph”

“But somehow she'd interpreted it as being something more?”

“She must have. Her brother came round last week, but I only saw him in the distance. Today was the first time I'd even spoken to him. Weird”

“Were you nice to her?”

“Nice? I suppose. Nothing out of the ordinary. Oh, I made her coffee once. About two months ago. I can't think of anything else. I leave her post it notes about instructions for things, say if I have to leave early to get Abs.”

“Not flirty?”

“'Turn off agitator at three' 'Blend Maggots from vivarium six with 500ml of water and refrigerate' 'Lock the evidence safe and give Jimmy the key.' This is not the stuff of great romance.”

“It isn't. Maybe she hoped?”

“I suppose. Poor kid. I hope everyone lets her forget it.”

“Will you press charges?”

“If he comes in again, I’ll warn him. If he thumps me? For sure. But I don't think he will. He did look pretty embarrassed. Your timing was spectacular.”

“I'm sorry not to have saved you from the nose-bleed”

“See? Rescuer”

“I think I might prefer to think of it as my knight in shining armour complex”

“I bet you would. Enough on this? I'd like to talk about what we're going to do when we get home?”

“Home?”

“Yeah. Home”

……..

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 35

Chapter Summary

Valentine's Day Part 5

(Finally! NSFW)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“He's a monster and I'm going to kill him. Buster! Sit down. Stay there.”

Hannibal watches with a mixture of surprise and perhaps the faintest trace of arousal which he notes somewhat ruefully. Will is really furious with the little dog who may be slowly remembering why Will is the Alpha of his pack.

“In there. Now. Eat your dinner. Shut up. Don't whine. Winston, eat yours. Lick him later. Nope. No patience with you. Eat”

Both dogs put their heads back down into their respective bowls. Will glares and then shuts the double doors between the conservatory and the rest of the house. Winston looks up at him through the glass doors and Will raises his eyebrows at her. She goes back to eating. She knows BIG will come back later and cuddle them. And wow was Buster naughty.

“Hannibal come into the kitchen so they can’t see me grovel”

Hannibal follows after Will. Will carrying the remains of, well, it's hard to tell, but it involved tapestry. Or embroidery. Something delicate and textile that must have smelled and tasted fantastic as it is now a sodden mess. Retrieving it from Buster had involved a chase round the garden, a lot of barking, Hannibal trying not to laugh as Will got crosser with the little dog.

Will had ended up tripping over Winston who was possibly trying to protect Buster, and both Hannibal trying to catch Will and Will failing to be caught had ended up in a flower bed. Will had been beyond furious. Buster, and Winston, for possible collusion, now in the dog house. Or rather, the conservatory.

“God, I am so sorry. What was this. I think it might be unsalvageable? He's normally better than this. Ok not that much, but some! God you're filthy. Did I hurt you? I'm sure I elbowed you?”

“A little perhaps. Nothing terminal. I'm sorry. It was actually very funny. Oh I know he has to learn not to eat things. Give me the cushion”

“Was it a cushion. Shit. Where are the feathers? Oh god”

Will rushes from the room, and Hannibal can't help but laugh some more when he hears in the distance Will shouting again. He's breathing hard when he comes back,

“Ok, so we won't have feather sick later, I found the inside. He must have ripped the cover and shaken it to death.”

“My love. It's fine. It's a cushion. I'm not even sure which one. Not the end of the world. And before you ask I'm not sure it can be washed or that the dry cleaner will welcome the challenge. Don't worry. But it's a useful reminder. There are one or two things I might move a bit more sensibly”

“You've got leaves in your hair.”

He laughs and takes some of the twigs and spring petals from Hannibal's hair,

“Ridiculous. Why don't I make something to eat while you have a shower or something, there's mud on your shoulder.”

He makes to rub at it but thinks better of it, better to let it dry probably.

“They need to be laundered anyway. You're right. What will you make?”

“I'll find something. Not mac n cheese. I promise. I'll give you a shout”

Hannibal smiles and considers the simple pleasures of someone else cooking for you while you recover from a dog based mishap.

“About fifteen minutes?”

“Take as long as you like. I might have to go and do the whole shouty thing again. So he doesn't forget.”

……

Hannibal wipes his face with a towel and wraps another one round his waist, he walks through the bathroom door into the bedroom,

“I didn't know you were there.”

“I moved the mirror a bit. So I could see you”

Will sits on the edge of the bed and smiles,

“I get the point of the mirrors now.” He grins,

Hannibal laughs a little,

“May I get dressed?”

“Yeah. Go on. I'll watch. Nothing fancy. White shirt and just plain dark pants”

“What's the phrase? 'You got bossy fast'? Is this the whole pack dynamic?”

Will barks a short burst of laughter,

“You know! Maybe it is. Come on. Grub’s ready. Actually given my job maybe not the best synonym.”

……..

“I used some of the chilli oil. It gives it the kick. Did you make it?”

“Last year. I made several. Rosemary, thyme, lemon. I think the chilli is the most successful”

“Do you cook much?”

“When I'm here, or with Mischa or my parents. Not on base. Well, only occasionally. I helped with Thanksgiving last year”

“I don't think I even asked you about it at the time”

“It's always a challenge, the family you make versus the one you have back home, maybe. If you do”

Will nods and they finish the pasta arabbiata and leaf salad.

“We had Jimmy and Brian round. Jimmy's got a twin he doesn't get on with and Brian has a whole host of family frictions. We had a lot of fun. They like you.”

“The feeling is mutual”

Will nods and gets up to clear the plates into the kitchen, he comes back with a small custard and fruit compote.

“I found the eggs. And I'm afraid I used half the jar of conserve. And some of that dark chocolate”

“We should start a shopping list. The things any of us will or won't eat”

“Alright. I've a pretty liberal palate shall we say. But there are things Abigail won't even look at. Organs mainly. Except liver, she loves liver. Weird child”

“This is good. I'm a bit lazy about desserts. Fruit. Cheese. Maybe sorbet”

They finish the meal and a the last of a half bottle of wine Hannibal had had a couple of glasses from, the night, or rather, the morning before.

“Shall I wash up?”

“Sure, give me a dryer”

They clean the various dishes and Will dries and stacks them, Hannibal watches him in the reflection of the window. Full dark outside, the lights slightly dimmed but clear inside.

Will stands behind him and lays a hand between his shoulder blades,

“You have a really great back. I like how in bed sometimes I wake up and I'm just wrapped around you”

Hannibal smiles,

“I like it too.”

Will reaches round both hands and smooths them down the front of Hannibal's shirt.

“And your chest. I know I don't have much hair. I like it. Very much. Nuzzling you. So masculine. Gorgeous.”

He lays his chin on Hannibal's shoulder and they both look up to the dark window behind the sink that looks out onto the garden. Catch each other's eye there. Will undoes the buttons at the top of Hannibal's shirt, keeps eye contact, then slides the tail out from the front of Hannibal's pants and pushes his hands up inside the shirt. Sliding his hands up Hannibal's chest, through the hair he adores. He circles one nipple and maybe flicks a little,

“Yes?

He watches Hannibal's face, he nods slightly, Will makes an effort with the rest of the buttons, watching himself in reverse. When the shirt is undone he pulls it back from Hannibal's shoulders and kisses him at the base of his neck. Keeps his hands moving over Hannibal's chest,

Hannibal's breath comes somewhat faster.

“Alright?”

“Yes. Will?”

“Shhh. I'll look after you. Ok?”

Their eyes meet again in the window. Will smiles into his shoulder and Hannibal closes his eyes.

Will works his hands down to Hannibal's belt, Hannibal shifts as if to help,

“I've got it”

He puts both hands back on the edge of the sink. Looks into the window. Watches Will’s hands work the belt out of its loops. Will gets the fly open and cups Hannibal in his hand and strokes and squeezes. Pushes the pants down the top of his thighs, wastes no time and pushes Hannibal's undershorts down too, works both hands round Hannibal's cock and works and works. Hannibal watches as he goes from mostly hard to hard. Leaking. Twitching in Will’s careful, coalescing hands.

“Still ok?”

He watches Hannibal. Hannibal watches him back. Sees the smile on Wills face which slides away down behind him as Will drops to one knee and pushes Hannibal's legs apart slightly, as far as the pants and undershirts will allow.

“If it's not good. Tell me to stop. And I will. Ok?”

Will can feel a little of the tension that Hannibal has been carrying dissipate, he smiles against Hannibal's lower back and kisses him at the base of his spine. A little sloppily.

He feels Will use his fingers and his mouth to move lower, just a little wet to begin with and then more, against him, seeking. Hannibal lets go of some small shudder.

He can't help himself he pushes back and moans long and low, Will pulls back a little,

“Good moan or please stop I'm not entirely comfortable moan”

“A little of the second but mostly the first. By some considerable way.”

Will pushes his face back between Hannibal's cheeks and sucks more strongly, points his tongue and licks and presses hard, Hannibal pants and moans again, lowers his head to his arms for a moment and then stretches up, looks in the darkness of the window. He can see Will crouched behind him, one hand on his waist, one hand holding him apart, God.

His breaths get more stuttered and aspirated. In the window he tries not to see his eyes glittering. Are they wet? Will pulls off,

“Let me take care of you Hannibal, let me”

It's a breath rather than a word,

“Please”

“How much do you care about these pants?

Hannibal can't really concentrate on the question,

“At this moment? Not at all”

“Good. Lean forwards again. Just a little. Lift your left foot, down again. Right. Down. Thank you.”

He pushes Hannibal's pants and underwear to one side and smooths his hands up and down the backs and sides of Hannibal's legs.

“Great legs. Don't move.”

He keeps a hand on Hannibal but reaches back to the other island and picks up one of the bottles of oil. He opens it, rosemary. Good.

“This is going to get real messy but it'll be damn good. Ok?”

“Don't stop”

Will coats his hands with oil and moves the tails of Hannibal's shirt to one side, strokes down the crack in his arse with one hand, fingers trailing with oil. He licks again at Hannibal. And licks. Slowly pushing just the end of one finger in.

“You're tight. It's fantastic”

“Will”

“I'll stroke you in a second. Hang on”

He sucks, and licks and pushes his finger around and in and out. Adds a second one, listens to the grabby breaths Hannibal is making, smiles to himself as he moves his fingers apart. A sharp moan in response. He reaches down to his own trousers and opens them one handed. He's been hard since dessert. Maybe half aroused by this possibility since the letter from Hannibal detailing it.

“Will. For gods sake. Will”

“It's ok. I won't leave you. Keep breathing, breathe each time I push”

He keeps his fingers moving with one hand and then kisses up Hannibal's back again, reaches round and strokes Hannibal's possibly painfully hard cock.

“It's a lot”

“Too much?”

“Not yet”

“Good. I'm going to fuck you now. Ok?”

“Please. God. Will”

“Shh, you don't need to ask, it's all yours Hannibal. Everything. Ok? Everything”

Will coats his own cock, god this is going to be messy, his face is already slippery with oil, some of it will be soaked up by Hannibal's shirt, or drip down to the floor, or something. Not what matters right now.

He holds his own breath, maybe Hannibal does too as he presses in. Slowly at first against some residual resistance, then there's a push past and he's pressed hard against Hannibal’s back,

“Fucking hell. Fuck. God. That's. You’re incredible. Ok. Ok. God. Try and breathe"

“I might not be able to”

“Fuck. Hang on”

Will holds him tight round the chest, Hannibal holds himself against the sink his head lowered, still leaking, so desperately aroused, if he looks at them in the window it's possible he might even come. Just a little more.

They both try and breathe. Something shifting within and between them. Not only physically.

“Ok. God. Hang on. Ok. I'll try..”

Will moves and Hannibal straight away pushes back onto him, they both manage a small cry of something maybe close to ‘this, always, now, forever, you, us’ and then it's all about one of them offering and the other accepting. And who it is doesn't need to be clarified. It just is.

“Shit. Hannibal. Fuck. It's going to be quick. God. You. No one said”

“The same. Will. “

Will comes first but with his desperate final thrusts they lock eyes again in the dark reflections of the window and Hannibal follows hard on his heels.

“Always you. Only you”

……..

No one cares about the mess.

……

“Perhaps I might say I'm glad it was the rosemary and not the chilli?”

Chapter End Notes

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.....

For those interested in writing process my outline for this chapter was:-
Dogs
Shower
Supper
Conv
Washing up
Window
All the damn sex

.....

The lovely hannibalsimago here on AO3 (go read! Really. We're so lucky in this fandom) who is also a joyful (and welcomingly distracting) presence in my life over on tumblr kindly helped with this chapter. HI originally thought that it might be possible to use a 'delight' slot from the Radiance Kickstarter to commission some writing within this story! What an amazing idea. A quick conversation revealed we'd already got similar thoughts on the matter. So I thought it only fair they get their full whack of a 1000+ word story separate from this chapter but I wanted to gratefully acknowledge the help, and hot arses.

(#14 of things I did not expect to say in this lifetime)

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 36

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

‘Dear Mischa,

Thank you so much for your letter which as you probably planned reached here just before me. Fortunately I collected it before the arrival of the dogs about whom I regret you will hear much. Will is now here and Abigail will join us properly this evening for the weekend. And I admit it, in every way, and you may use this against me forthwith, you were right. You were right.

Of course there will be much to negotiate. Which reminds me we really do need to talk about grandmama’s furniture. Please, save me. Will is threatening to go round the whole house with a rainbow of stickers indicating just how awful he finds each piece. Is it really so bad? I fear it must be? Is there anything you want or would definitely prefer me not to sell, give away to friends, or leave on the street overnight in the desperate hope someone takes it away? And for god’s sake don't tell mother. She will have opinions even if she continues with this entente cordial. Has she told you any more about it?

Will has now written to his father and his in-laws. We are currently waiting for the fall-out from that. I admit to mildly wishing I was several thousands of miles away. Contrary to family belief I think I may be a coward. Will is sitting fairly light to it but as he reminds me he has had some time both to learn to be himself and acknowledge the various selves of others. I feel both fiercely protective (of him and us) and also somewhat nervous of any influence they may endeavour to exert. I know what you would say. And what Will would say. That will have to be enough for now to fortify me.

I shall be collecting the car later. Will and I have agreed that Buster cannot be trusted near it. Except perhaps to urinate on the hub caps in an act of defiance and territorial marking. Suffice to say there is a battle for status in the pack. I may not be winning. Buster was singularly unimpressed about.., actually I don't think I shall tell you that. There are some indignities that younger sisters do not need to know about. (I said there would be much about the dogs.)

I remain concerned about the things you did not talk about in Paris. Mischa my darling girl, if I am permitted to spill all my broken pieces onto the table ready for gluing together by your kind hand might I offer the same? Or Will, who either despite of or because of the awful hand he has been dealt mends as he breathes.

We are breathing Mischa. We are alive. You and us. Let us also mend where we can.

You are my dearest light, thankyou,

Hannibal’

He puts it in an envelope and seals it.

“Will? Do you have any international stamps? For Europe?”

“Only from France. Sorry. I'm going to take the dogs for a walk, terrorise the others at the dog park. Do you want to come? I'm easy either way. I'll grab some more eggs and milk on the way back. I can get stamps. Just a letter. Do you want me to take it?”

He fiddles with two dog leads, and then looks up at Hannibal,

“What? Hannibal?”

“I'm enjoying the normality. And yes I'll come to the dog park. God knows we could all do with some training”

“Buster may hate you if I let you have his lead. I'll think about that. We've got to fit you in. But it might be worse with Winston if he feels he has to protect her. Alright then. Come on. Dog psychology 101. What do you know about psychiatry and psychology? You must have had to do some training in it?”

…….

Will’s father chews the end of his biro. Damn if his boy doesn't always make it hard on himself. He debates. In French or English? English. They tend to use French only for domestic face to face. Hmm. Tough call,

Dear Will,

Thanks for your letter son. I have to say you've probably chosen a world of pain for yourself. Not the gay thing. Although, you know Molson is going to have things to say about that. He's not real smart about some things. You know it. I know it.

I mean about him being a Soldier. And away. Will honey, first Margot and now this guy? I'm a terrible example, I know that surely, but son, must your happiness always be so far away. Alright I know. Not helpful. Sorry. I just don't want it to be so bad.

And yeah, I know I've changed my tune. But you're doing a good job with Abs. My golden girl. The picture of her and him in Paris is really something. He looks very fine and she looks like she just worships the ground he walks on. Is that so? He make her happy too? Cos that right there is a winner. What's the thing kids say? He's a keeper?

Make the most of this, you know Molson will be bad and did you know Mason got religion? Damn shame. He might be bad too. I got a letter from him a few weeks back. Wanted to know if you'd remembered Margot's anniversary coming up. I said I was sure you had. So, a heads up. He's gonna want to talk about it. He's hurting bad. I think he just got through denial or whatever it is. Yeah I went to group. It was ok.

When you come by at Spring Break bring him with you if you like. It'd be interesting to meet him. Get him to bring his uniform, we can go impress some of the guys. Only thing better than a Vet is a guy in service. And what's the thing with the family? You're joking about the whole castle business? Aren't you? You better be.

If Molson is a real shit I can do a bit of business my end. Ok? Spread the load Will. I know you won't. Let the guy help at least. He looks like he could take Molson and Mason at the same time.

Tell my girl I love her. I love you too. I know, I know.

Ton pere.

…….

“We need to wait on the same side of the road as the school gate otherwise there's just a chance she'll be so excited to see you she'll forget about the road. And she won't know the car. Ok?”

“I shall be guided by you. In this at least”

“Uh huh. I'm just trying to think if I should have got anything else from home. Well. The other home”

They'd stopped at Will and Abigail's home on the way to Abigail's school. Will had collected post, Godzilla, a couple of dvds, and a few books. And a few more shirts of his own. Two have already had small accidents and are now in the laundry.

“We could go into the city tomorrow if you like. I always welcome an opportunity to browse for books or music”

“Do you actually play them or is it another legacy from grandmama?”

“No, I can play. I've a theramin too if that interests you”

Will laughs,

“Of course you do. How very obscure of you”

“I'll take that as a compliment I think”

Will carries on smiling. When they pull up near the gates of Abi’s school they get out of the car and lean against the hood.

“This is a swanky car. You're getting looks”

“We are”

“Sure, but I'm blaming the car. Oh. You'll like this, this is Clark’s mom. The lil shit? Mrs Ingram? How are you?”

“Dr Graham hello, I just wanted to say our Clark couldn't stop raving about the soldier you brought with you to class yesterday. He so impressed our boy. Thank you. He did have some story about him being Abigail's other daddy which is a sweet notion. I explained that Abi was just a bit confused about that. Clark was pretty sure. So I thought I'd let you know there's a teeny bot of confusion in the class you might want to straighten out”

Hannibal smiles at the perhaps unintentional play on words,

“Mrs Ingram, a pleasure I'm sure. I'm Colonel Lecter, I met Clark yesterday. He did very well. You should be proud”

“Oh. Oh. Well that's very kind I'm sure. You're not in uniform. I didn't realise”

“Not at all why would you. But Clark was right about Abigail, I get to be her other daddy. He wasn't lying to you. I’m sure you raised him better than that, I’m Will’s partner. Though as you can imagine, on active service, I'm not here as often as I'd like to be”

He smiles, incredibly genially, and Mrs Ingram looks between Will and Hannibal several times. She's interrupted by Clark and Abigail,

“Sir! sir! I watched a programme last night all about the tanks in World War 2 sir. It was very interesting. Have you been in a tank sir?”

“I have. I'm glad you found it interesting, you should have a look at the tanks from World War 1, see how different they are. Maybe you'd tell me what you think next time I'm in school”

Abigail grins at him,

“Hello, hello, we had pancakes again this morning, Beverly says Happy Valentine's Day and sends you both a kiss. But not smoochy she said.”

Hannibal reaches down and hugs her, Will smiles at Mrs Ingram,

“Hannibal only arrived back yesterday, but we got to have Valentine's together which is always special.”

Mrs Ingram blinks. Clark grins at Hannibal and even Dr Bug Guy can't be all bad in these circumstances so Will gets a smile too.

……..

In the car Abigail can't stop laughing as Hannibal explains all about the cushion and Buster and the battle in the garden. Will flicks through his post, circulars, reminders, bills and the like. Oh, a personal letter. He checks the sender address, yeah he thought so. He opens it with a thumb nail and scans down it. Reads it again. He folds it up and rests it in his lap and looks out of the window and takes deep breaths.

“Will?”

“Just a thing. Abs’ grandpa. I'll tell you later. Abs? Your grandpa and grandma say hi, they're looking forwards to seeing you Spring Break and Uncle Mason is going to swing by next week. Okay?”

“Yeeeeeessss. Are they ok?”

“They seem to be”

“Did Grandpa cuss?”

“Guess how many times?”

“Maybe six. How long is it?”

“Just three sides. Not long really”

“Maybe three per side?”

“Good guess, but actually twelve”

“Wow!”

“Wow indeed. But he's alright Abs. So’s Grandma. And Uncle Mason has started going to church. He sent you a picture card. You can have it when we get back. Ok sweets?”

“Thank you. What's it of?”

“I'm not entirely sure. We can find out”

“Ok. Daddy what are we going to do about Buster?”

Will sighs, god, Buster?

“Good question Abs. Maybe take him for special training. Hey, we could take Grandpa too! Do you think that might help!”

“Nope. Not at all daddy. He's just mean”

Will smiles at the happiness in her voice. May she never know how deep Molson cuts.

……..

“Frankie? What you doing?”

Tobias Budge leans on the divider between the kitchen and living area of his girlfriend’s house,

“Looking for a movie. You want to go out or stay in?”

“I don't mind one bit. Really. I'm just glad to be back girl”

She turns and smiles at him, then looks back at the TV she's surfing, maybe Netflix or Prime, something,

“I know you are. Your Colonel doing alright?”

“He is. New love interest. Going somewhere, kind of why we're back. Single parent family too.”

“That's sweet. Little girl or little boy?”

“Girl. She came to Paris. Hey. I got you something. It's in my duffel at the base, I'll bring it by”

“When you going in?”

“Pentagon? Monday. Find out what the deal is”

He comes and slumps on the sofa beside her, runs his hands over his head, little bit of jet lag still,

“Your guy’s show?”

“Hard to say. I think he's on the up. Might make General. Might take me along for the ride. Might bring me back”

Frankie’s quiet for a moment, it's been a continuing source of worry for her,

“You know I'd like that”

“I do. I'm doing everything I can to make it work out for the Colonel. He's a great guy as well. And a good boss. Did I tell you he got Miriam a place too?”

“Yeah? He's not sweet on her is he? Spreading the love and all?”

“Babe, didn't I say? The Colonel’s gay. His guy works for the FBI”

“Really? I had no idea that was even allowed. Oh I know, in theory. But, you know? Especially so high up? Isn't he vulnerable?”

“I'd have said no more than anyone. He's up front about it. No hiding”

“I'm just amazed it's not come up before. How long’s he been seeing this man”

“Six months kind of. You know. Long distance thing”

“Well he has my sympathy there. That's no fun. Before then?”

“He's been on his own a while. Had a brief thing going with someone who got kicked back because of it. He's being a total shit still. Didn't want what he got, but don't want anyone else to have it either”

Frankie crinkles her nose, her sister is just the same,

“Well, we’ll just be extra nice to your Colonel then”

“That's good, he's got some idea ‘bout taking us all out for a meal. His lot, you and me, Miriam, I don't know if she's seeing anyone. Some of Dr Graham’s colleagues too.”

“Ok. That sounds like fun. And I'll try and convince him that if he goes up the ladder you'd keep it steady for him”

He grins. That's a nice image. He might tell the Colonel that one.

……..

Chapter End Notes

If you're reading this, thank you so much! If you're dropping a kudos, wow, awesome, that's like catnip for writers and makes me wanna write more and faster (but without quality loss, obvs). If you're commenting, that's like double kudos, or if you've already hit the button but you like the most recent chapter.

Truly grateful to everyone .... and from the kudos list there are some damn fine 'names' out there. I'm so impressed by how imaginative people are.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 37

Chapter Notes

Very brief nsfw. Really. Very brief. Don't get the hopes up. Or do. Do get your hopes up!

“Would you like to talk about the letter?”

“What I'd like is to hide under this blanket and maybe just send Abi on ahead preferably with sticks of dynamite. You can get dynamite can't you? I mean, why have a Soldier lover if they can't get ordnance?”

“There may be other reasons?”

He kisses Will as if to make the point. Will does what Hannibal recognises now as a wriggle that means he could go either way. Either into a more erotic sensibility or into a much more prosaic matter of fact-ness. Hannibal can sometimes influence which way it goes, but not entirely. Will kisses him harder and presses himself further across Hannibal's chest.

It's a good position they're in. Hannibal can hardly believe how easy it is to sink into this heady normalcy. Eat supper, bicker about the dogs, everyone clears up, Abigail has stories, Abigail fights for more stories, Abigail goes to bed, Abigail forgets water, kitty, what day it is. Abigail goes to bed, again.

They read, they talk, they don't talk about the letter. They talk about having some kind of something for their friends and Hannibal's staff. They go to bed. Just normal things. And now lying here, Hannibal lying against his pillows and the mattress from heaven, really, so good. And Will half lying across him, koalaed round him. And right now? Kissing. Glorious. Normal.

“Talk about it tomorrow? I'm still thinking about what tack to take. And yeah, you could help with that for sure. But right now? Other things. Tell me something else you're thinking about other than my father-in-law’s state champion cussing ability. Really, six years running and you should have heard him the year he lost!”

“I was thinking about whether we might make you come from prostate massage alone”

“Fucking hell! You buried the lead! That talk about the letter! Now I'm just impossibly aroused! What would that involve? Lubed fingers in my arse because I'm telling you, you better make good on that!”

They both laugh and the kissing and moving together gets more intense. There are grazing touches. And teasing. Hannibal discovers exactly where on Will’s neck to nibble to get the sharp breathy moan he so adores. Will discovers exactly what combination of writhing against Hannibal gets him to respond with deeper kisses and more focussed hands. God, the hands? The hands!

Hannibal pulls back,

“Will? Is that Abigail?”

They both listen for a moment,

“You're right. Damn. I'll go see. I might need to bring her back. Ok?”

“Of course. Your prostate and my fingers are going nowhere. There'll be another time. I'll find a shirt. You'd better too”

He gestures towards Will’s torso, there's the evidence of some sucked bruising there. Ardent marks of ownership that Hannibal scatters, seeds that blossom into flowers against Will’s pale skin.

“Good call. And some underwear too. Where did I throw mine?”

Hannibal swings his legs over the side of the bed and retrieves his own sleepwear and Will’s shorts which he offers to him.

“Thanks. Ok, it is definitely her, and not stopping either. Prepare yourself. She’ll sniffle, and then snuggle and then go to sleep. Alright?”

“Of course.”
……..

“Abigail? Do you remember when you flew a long way and then couldn't get to sleep at the right time?”

She nods. This isn't so bad. And Hannibal has a good arm to hug.

“You know I arrived the day before yesterday? It's very odd inside my brain. How did you get to sleep eventually?”

“Daddy told me a story, and I had a glass of water, then I told a bientot kitty the story daddy told me and then I think I went to sleep”

“Oh! Was it a good story? Is it a go to sleep story? Could I possibly ask you to tell me it?”

“You have to lie down and close your eyes properly.”

“Like this?”

“No! Silly. Closed properly. I'll show you. Then you have to breathe in and out and count backwards from ten”

Abigail demonstrates to Hannibal how to lie with your eyes closed breathing slowly, he follows her instructions,

“Will you count back with me?”

They count back together, slowly, in time with one another. Somewhere around six or maybe five they’re both asleep. Will looks at them, a tender and amused expression hovering across his face. Fuck Molson. And maybe Mason too.

……

Miriam lies on her narrow bed with rough but familiar blankets and looks up at the ceiling of her small room on base. She's been offered a space in a small shared apartment nearer where they'll be in Washington but hasn't decided whether to go for it yet. Base is kind of like home. Safe. Predictable. Consistent. She's a big fan of structured. A big fan. Kind of nice to have the whole weekend. Kind of strange too. What the hell is she supposed to do with herself?

……..

Will smiles to himself. There's tea beside the bed. God. Amazing. Abigail is downstairs eating breakfast with Hannibal, and Buster? Buster is asleep at the foot of the bed. On the floor, but still. Winston is curled in front of the fireplace. At the moment Will can't decide if this means he has won this particular battle or lost it. Or if Hannibal has.

Hannibal.

And Molson can still go and darn well fuck himself.

…….

“Ok folks, normal day then? Abs have we got homework to do this weekend?”

“Story and picture. And some math”

“Alright. That sounds do-able. Picture for the story? Or just a picture?”

She shrugs. Ok. Either way then.

“Hannibal? Have you got homework?”

Hannibal looks up from the reading he's currently doing,

“For Monday? I should go over the papers. Perhaps make one or two calls or emails. Will, what about you?”

Will makes a face,

“In theory some maggot monitoring. I don't have to go in to the lab, but I must look at the data. Jack wants me to look over some stuff for the journalist via Fred. Still with the East Coast guy. He's still a shit. And I'm going to call Mason. Abs, if I call your uncle will you say hello?”

“Is Uncle Mason coming?”

“I hope so, maybe next week. That's the idea. Ok with that?”

“Can he bring another picture?”

“You can ask him. Alright?”

She carries on with the important activity that involves three kitties and a tentacle doll Will doesn't want to ask too much about but suspects involves Bev or maybe Molly.

“Ok. We all set, or we want to decide now if we're doing some family thing before Hannibal goes to work on Monday and we do school and stuff Abs?”

“Are we staying here next week?”

Will glances at Hannibal, ah, they haven't got this far, ok,

“This week is like Hannibal's first week at school, lots of things to get used to. He's going to be running around and driving back and forwards. He might have to stay in Washington overnight a few times. Let's let him get settled in and then it will be easier to work out where it's best for us all to be. How's that?”

Abigail doesn't say anything,

“Abs?”

“I like it here”

Hannibal looks up from his reading, Abigail staring determinedly at her dolls as she sits at the small desk in the living room, Will looking at her with a look Hannibal recognises from managing Buster and Winston in full on defiant mode, ahh, like that. He makes a small cough,

“Excellent, I thought you might dislike the furniture. And is your bed comfortable? I wondered if that's why you didn't sleep so well. Should we get a new comforter? Actually we must buy a lampshade. Maybe that's what we'll do this afternoon? And I think if Brian and Jimmy are free tomorrow we could have lunch with them and I can punish Jimmy for introducing me to those puzzles. And Abigail you could then show Brian your math. I believe he is good at math?”

“Do you have to go to work on Monday?”

“I think you are going to school on Monday? Or has Miss Bloom given you the day off”

Abigail giggles and puts down the dolls. She looks at her daddy,

“I don't think so. I think I have to go”

Hannibal answers her,

“Me too. Then we shall be brave at the same time. You shall go to school and I shall go to work. I'll have to be up early as it's a long drive. Actually. Your other house is nearer, could we stay there tomorrow night? Will would that be alright?”

Will looks at him. Oh nicely done! Nicely done.

“I'm not sure. Abigail? Do you think we could make that work? We'd have to go to bed at a sensible time to make sure Hannibal gets enough sleep to get up, even if it's not quite so early. And we'd probably all have to try and stay asleep. That means no wriggling Hannibal! And no giggling Abigail. And no licking Buster.”

Abigail giggles and slides off her chair and comes and leans against her daddy,

“Alright. But can we put the lampshade up tonight?”

“That means we have to find one this afternoon. After lunch then?”

“Hannibal helped me decide already what it should be like. It's going to be a sky balloon”

Will looks queryingly at Hannibal.

“Hot air balloon”

Of course.

…….

Brian laughs at Will’s recounting of the previous day's events,

“I guess that's why he's a good soldier, make it look like a win for everyone?”

“Oh I'm not knocking it. Maybe even taking notes! But there's bound to be one we lose”

“Of course. Bound to be. Her math is ok Will. Not bad. Miss Bloom is pushing them along by the looks of it.”

Will nods,

“Yeah. No complaints there either.”

“Gone ok? First weekend?”

“I think so. Yeah. I'm a pessimist. It's been great. Just normal stuff”

Brian leans in,

“The sex still ok?”

Will smiles back at him, with Jimmy he'd get a salacious wink, but with Brian it's a different kind of concern. Jimmy is Brian's third male partner but he's still getting blowback from his family. Part of his own background hellish domestic dynamic.

“Thanks for asking. No, I mean it. It's kind of you. Yes. It's ok. Actually better than. We talk a lot about it. What does or doesn't work, what we do or don't care for. Yeah, his phrasing. Kinda sweet. It's good. You know the whole backstory. I'm doing well. He's better than tolerant of all my shit. And I give him space to have his own kind of shit from before”

“And is before still around?”

“I'm certain Hannibal will run into Mr Colonel in Washington. We’ll deal with it when we have to. I'm not looking forwards to it. We've got Margot’s family lining up on one side and the fucker on the other”

“Can we get him in the same room as Bev and Molly?”

“Oh! Nice. Yeah. I thought of that before. Good reminder. Look, I know I'm joking a bit,”

“I know you are Will, it's ok. I know how it goes”

He smiles at Will. Brian is intensely grateful for all the ways in which Will has his back. At work and in the rest of his life. He steps up when other people don't. Steps back when asked as well. Kind of rare as these things go.

“Yeah. Thanks. I know you do. Damn! What has Jimmy bought? God that better be for your house and not ours! Brian you’ve got to come and see the furniture! Sheesh. I don't love him for the furniture for sure”

“I'm glad you love him Will”

Will smiles at his friend. Definitely not for the furniture.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 38

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Miriam would you like coffee or are you alright there?”

“Sir!”

Private Lass has been hovering over the coffee and breakfast pastries in the large meeting room for the last few minutes, Hannibal suspects she's not entirely happy but today is not the day to ask.

“Can I get you coffee sir?”

“Thank you that would be kind. I left Dr Graham's a little too early to be civilised and one of the dogs was singularly unimpressed that I woke them”

“Is Abigail alright Sir. Oh. And Dr Graham?”

“They both are. Thank you. Abigail is endeavouring to adjust to the new circumstances and we are all adjusting to her adjusting.”

“Not easy Sir”

“These things take time. You staying on base or moving closer”

“Considering the options Sir. I'll review at the end of the week”

“That sounds sensible. Remind me to think about just how bad the commute is in a week will you?”

“Sir. Here's the coffee Sir”

“Thank you Private. Go and talk to the Sargeant, he looks as deficient in coffee as the rest of us”

He watches as Miriam walks across the room and then speaks with Tobias. Tobias perks up and they are soon engaged in conversation. It's all going to take time but for the moment this is a good enough beginning.

……

“Sit, sit, have a seat, please take a seat. Thank you. I want to talk to you about the week ahead. Really I hope that everything will be clearer as the week progresses. But well, we shall see. It will all begin in earnest week after next I think. How are you settling in? Is it good to be back? How is your partner and the little girl? She’s what, eight? All alright?"

“She's fine sir thank you”

“Bit of a big change I imagine?”

Hannibal thinks of all the ways in which it has been a big change simply over the weekend. And no doubt there will be other changes they have yet to even anticipate. He thinks of Will navigating

Abigail's needs, Hannibal's needs and his own. Hannibal notes, perhaps a little ruefully, that Will pretty consistently put his own last.

“Yes it is all new. But we will get used to it, in time, I'm sure. These things do take time, and at the moment I'm mostly regretting the hour I had to get up this morning.”

General Davies smiles, long commutes are a killer,

“Yes me too I greatly wish my wife was not so addicted to New York, she's got family there. Of course it means we see too much of them as well. I envy you having all of your family in Europe? That's right isn't it?”

“My parents and sister, sir. I have an aunt and uncle in Japan”

“Oh yes, I’d forgotten about them I think your father mentioned it. His brother, is that right? Hannibal?”

Hannibal nods. The army is such a small world even when someone has been retired for a good long while as has his father.

“How are your staff doing? Your Private seemed very much in command of herself this morning? And your sergeant at arms seems absolutely in the right job, is that your opinion too?”

“It is so far. Sargeant Budge knows what he's about and Private Lass I think could go a long way. She is diligent, smart and very focused. I've it in mind to recommend her for redeployment with a promotion. If she does well here.”

“In that case I'll keep an eye out for her. Anything else you need at the moment Hannibal? If not I'll get my guy to show you around the office we’re giving you and the space for your staff. Alright?”

“Thank you sir that sounds fine. I suspect we’re just getting our feet under the desks today and familiar with the locale and short cuts round the building, and with whether we actually have a desk, preferably each. Do you know?”

“I’m the wrong person to ask. When I first got here it took me a month to even find my office, and when I got there it had already been requisitioned for someone else.”

They both laugh. This is not so unusual a story.

“Let me know if there's a problem. I’ll want to speak to you probably each day Hannibal. Can you clear 10 minutes each morning for me, preferably face-to-face, otherwise an email or text to set-up a quick call or drop by. Alright?”

“Of course. Shall I get Sargeant Budge to schedule it with your assistant?”

“Please do. I also need you and probably your Private to look over the dinner guests and invitations for the formal. We're getting a few Senators and other brass and maybe the VP. As well as all the visitors and their families and hanger-ons. You should bring your partner. Make sure he dances with some of the other wives and partners. Can he dance?”

Hannibal smiles to himself, Will is going to love this, all territoriality and everything. He considers for a moment, actually maybe he would enjoy it. The dancing at least.

…….

“Will? Is this a good moment to call? I've got five minutes if you have?”

“Hannibal? How's your day going I didn't think you'd get any time to call. Wow is this how it's going to be. Awesome. I won't expect it, I’ll enjoy it when you do get time”

Hannibal laughs,

“it's good not to expect it but I may manage to make regular calls. Although I have to admit that I had to get Tobias to show me how this cell phone worked, it's not the same as the one I had on base. Though actually, all I could do with that phone was call and text. And even that not always successfully. I think I called mother when I meant to call Mischa at least three times. It had very unresponsive voice recognition software. Mischa does not sound like mother to my mind but the phone thought so.”

“Hannibal, I’ve got a couple of minutes now before I go to a meeting with Jack and Fred. Do you know if you're coming home this evening?”

“I'm not 100% sure, it partly depends on how the rest of the day goes. At the moment it looks as though we will be finished by six or seven at the latest. That would mean I'd be back around eight. Would that be too late?”

“What's your alternative? To go back to Baltimore and get there even later in the evening? Or is there an arrangement locally, maybe a hotel? I'm sorry I didn't really ask what the plan would be for the week. What do you think would work best for you. You don't need to worry about us too much it's our regular pattern, we just need to work out what works for you, and how we can fit it all. Okay I can see Jack hovering at the door of the lab, I better go. Why don't you text me when you decide what to do this evening; if we see you that’d great. If we don't, well, you're only down the road, and finally not a ridiculous number of miles away, and that's fantastic. Okay I really have to go now Jack is beyond hovering, maybe levitating? Yeah levitating. I love you I hope you have a great afternoon. First day and everything”

Hannibal just about has time to say goodbye before the line cuts out. He is mildly entertained by the fact that, unusually, it is Will who has had to cut the communication short. This too may be something he has to get used to.

……

“Abigail, come and talk to uncle Mason, yeah right now. I know. He's on the phone, now stop what you're doing and come and talk to him. Here you go.”

Will listens as Abigail speaks to her uncle. She always seemed to like him but the relationship has been difficult ever since Margot died. It's probably not surprising, but Will finds it sad. Ideally he'd like Abigail to have a good relationship with her uncle. But every time they see each other it just seems to make them both upset. That may be partly because every time they see each other it's some goddam anniversary. Mason’s plan for this weekend involves going to Margot's grave, it's three years. Three whole years. Damn. He watches Abigail,

“Ok. We’ll get some flowers. Ok. Yes. I think so. Maybe daddy knows? Alright I'll pass the phone back. I love you Uncle Mason. Yes. See you”

“Mason?”

“Will? Abigail mentioned Hannibal. She'd quite like him to come this weekend I think. I'd like to meet him if that's okay? Would that be all right? I know what Pa says, you know, he's not shy about sharing, but really I'm not interested in what he has to say about it. I want Abigail to be happy and to remember her mom. But I don't want that to mean that you're on your own or that you're miserable. I know Pa probably told you about me going to church, maybe your pere too? I'd like to talk to you about that as well, would that be okay?”

“Sure, I don't mind Mason, obviously it will be a much nicer day out, well as much as it can be, if you don't give me a hard time but I'm up for a discussion, meet halfway maybe?”

“Will, I don't know what my pa said to you really or what he said about the church, but you know he's got his own opinions. He's got the wrong end of the stick about the church and about what I think. Really I am happy for you, and as long as Abigail is okay I'm with you on this, I'll be on side. Really I've had enough of Pa and his hypocrisy I'm not interested in it, so I'll see you this weekend, don't forget the flowers, don't forget Hannibal, and we'll see what we can make of it, okay?”

Faintly, but gratefully, Will manages,

“Mason I’ll be honest this isn't what I expected at all, my father was worried too. Are you sure? If there are things you wanna say it's okay, well not much fun, but okay?”

“Really Will, I’m okay with it, if Abigail is okay, if you're okay, why shouldn't I be? I'll see you on Saturday. Three years, God Will how have we managed?”

Will puts the phone down. Looks at it thoughtfully, not at all what he had been expecting. Not at all. Three years.

……..

Will looks at his watch. Abigail's been in bed for over an hour. He'd made a start early because he suspected it might take time to get her there. She'd held out as long as possible in the hope that Hannibal would get back, maybe for story, then kiss kitty, then say goodnight. But he hadn't.

In the end Will had sat beside Abigail and had the talk probably he should have had with Hannibal about how the two months are going to work. He makes a huge effort to keep emphasising that at the end Hannibal will go back to his base. That even if they all have a wonderful time he will have to go because that is his job.

Not surprisingly Abigail is not wildly impressed by this and Will too has to work hard to sound even half way convincing to himself let alone her. Shit. He already feels over dependent on it. After forty eight freaking hours.

But they've been good. Really good. Just lots of normal and happy and dull. What had he said to Frederick, sex, three hot dinners and a trip to the zoo? Apart from the zoo, that's been pretty accurate. And Hannnibal is going to be here for two more months.

In the end he and Abigail compromised on trying to make sure that the three of them had the weekends all together unless Will or Hannibal had work they had to go to, and that they'd try and see everything else as a bonus. Abigail was mildly heartened, but clearly still a bit anxious or upset

or oh. Shit. Mason. Not his fault. But of course. The reminder. No one is permanent. And then they leave you. And really, deep down, it's your fault.

Will sighs. And damn, he wishes Hannibal was back already.

When he hears the car he takes a deep breath, goes in to the kitchen, turns the burner up on the oven to re-heat some food, and pours Hannibal a glass of wine. He then smiles at himself. God. How he loves the whole domestic thing.

“Hey, nice day at the office?”

Hannibal laughs,

“My darling, you should see the traffic, are my pipes warmed and my slippers by the placemat? That doesn't sound right? Something like that. God. Wine, thank you so much. And you haven't made dinner? I think I've died and gone to heaven!”

“You idiot. Actually I wasn't going to say. But I've changed my mind. I've missed you. I hate it. I hate that your commute is hell. I hate that you're tired. I hate that I'm already missing you in two months time. There I've said it. I'd have just bottled it up otherwise”

Hannibal looks at him with a kind of wonder on his face and sits down in one of the armchairs next to the space heater by the chimney. Winston grumbles in her doze.

“Come and sit with me Will”

Will makes a grumbly face but does as he's asked, Hannibal pulls him down to sit across his lap, he takes a mouthful of wine and then puts the glass down on the floor beside him.

“You're right. In every way. I hate it too. It was too long today. Shall we look at a map and see if we can find somewhere equidistant between work, school and the other work? I can swing some of the rent, if the General hasn't the budget. It might even be cheaper than putting me up in some decent hotel. It'd make a difference to all of us. And I've drafted a letter about redeployment. I was going to wait until the end of the slot, but I already know. I don't want to wait. I want to be able to get home and put Abigail to bed, and then to put you to bed too. And everything in between.”

“Oh”

“Good ‘oh’, or bad ‘oh’?”

“How about total surprise ‘oh’?”

“But still good?”

Will nods. Fucking hell. Is this actually going to work?

“How will we sort it out? That could take days or weeks? We're both busy and..”

“Will darling, that's why I have staff? You've met Miriam? She'll lap this up. Utterly. Something very clear to achieve that she can manage easily. She's had a bit of a tough weekend, re-integrating and all. She'd do a good job. Tonight, or probably over breakfast we’ll make a list if things it must have and things it'd be good to have. Yes?”

Will nods,

“Ok, today got better fast. Actually it's not been so awful, well, apart from..”

“I know. Apart from… I want to hear the other good things, and I want something to eat, and to drink this wine, and to kiss you, and to have nine hours sleep in the next seven.”

“I can help with maybe four out of five”

“Eighty percent? That's outstanding in my book. Kiss me first?”

Chapter End Notes

I've worked out the chapter count. I hope it won't put anyone off, we're looking at somewhere around the 100 chapters mark. All this kind of length which is usually between 1800-2100 words. So, you're already almost 40% through! *smiles nervously* I usually underestimate but this time I might be slightly over. But you know. I thought I'd give people a rough estimate.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 39

“Who is Will talking to?”

“I'm not sure. But I think he's talking French so that's usually his father”

“Oh. Ok. He know Jack wants us all in?”

“I haven't told him. How long we got?”

“Maybe five minutes?”

Bev looks around the benches and spots a note pad and then scribbles something. She heads to the glass doors that separate the lab from the morgue and autopsy suite and knocks on them and then points at the pad when Will looks her way,

>Jack - 5 mins. East Coast Killer!!!! New info!<

Will glances down at his watch and nods to her and turns away again. Bev and Jimmy wait for him to join them.

“Ok? That looked full on?”

“Yup. Mon pere managing to surprise me! I never can entirely predict him. Turns out he's been going to grief counselling and AA. Just got his six month chip. Amazing. Anyway, hey Jimmy, you'll like this, read Bev the letter, it's not long.”

Jimmy takes it from him and scans it and laughs,

“Well that is a surprise. How did that turn around?”

Instead of reading it aloud he passes it to Bev, she runs through it then looks up sharply at Will,

“Oh my god!”

She grabs Will into a hug. And he's as surprised by the hug as he is by the letter and the call and suddenly he and Jimmy and Bev are group hugging and crying. Brian pushes into the lab,

“Seriously guys? Fluids! Oh my god. And what the heck? Is this some new three way you weren't inviting me to? Cos seriously I'd be pissed.”

His friends look at him and Bev makes a nothing personal but ewww face.

“I meant being left out. I didn't mean the three way, no Jack, I'm so sorry, that's not what it sounded like, well it is, but not in that way, I'm shutting up right now.”

Jack looks at him, then at the others, still evidence of some tears and relief there,

“Do I even want to know? Let alone need to know? I didn't think so. Really anyone would think this was for a kindergarten for PhDs. Come on. I've got three county coroners from some no where place in West Virginia and just over the border into Ohio. They each think they've had our guy pay

a visit. Some enterprising kid on a local rag played sleuth and dug up the info. Fortunately not the corpses. Though that's being done now. Court ordered”

“Three events or three individuals?”

“Come and sit down. Get coffee or Will get tea, you don't look like you need more excitement. Everything ok?”

“Surprisingly yes. I can honestly say it's been five days of almost consistently good. Apart from the nose. And Abi. Oh god and Buster, and making Hannibal kneel and be ignored, that came out wrong, and the terrible antler Christmas tree, and my father-in-law…”

Jack interrupts,

“Him what cusses?”

“The very same”

Everyone in the team met Molson. Initially and understandably they'd all thought him undone by grief at the death of his daughter. Then they discovered he was mean and ornery all the time. And a first rate cusser. Even Jack had learnt new vernacular.

“What's Mr. Verger done?”

“Ahh”

Will pauses, oh what the hell, he’ll tell them all at some point or another,

“Tell you what, as soon as we talk to these guys and we've done what we can, I'll read you all the letter he sent last week”

“Bit of a stinker is it?”

“You remember those guys we fished out of the Delaware? Varnished? Rotting from the inside out? Got caught in a beaver dam?”

“Oh yeah, the mural guy?”

“Remember the smell?”

They all do, it took weeks to dissipate and some of the waders had never been the same since their encounter with people soup. They nod,

“Way worse!”

……..

“I read them the letter. There was a lot of groaning and despairing noises. But really I see that Molson is out on his own so maybe I feel just the teeniest bit of sadness for him. None of this turned out the way he could have imagined”

At the other end of the call Hannibal smiles at Will’s capacity to feel the pain and sorrow of others and to forgive it even when the worst excesses are aimed at him. Though in part that has led to him

believing that not only should he be a receptacle for all the challenges of those he knows but that they both can and are permitted to crowd out the good things. No room for them in the bone arena of his skull. Hannibal will take down every one of those obstacles that stand between Will and happiness. He will fight for it.

“And are you going to let me read it now?”

“Yeah. I suppose so. But really, the edited highlights were much better”

Hannibal doesn't say anything, waiting for Will to reach his own conclusions,

“Ok. Of course you should read it. And I'll show it to Mason at the weekend. Hey, did you give the list to Miriam?”

“I did. She's already narrowed it down to eight. She's emailed me the particulars. We can look at them tonight. And arrange viewing for the day after tomorrow. All the brokers she spoke to said they could miss the referencing stage for an army family. I did say there were advantages to a soldier lover other than access to ordnance”

Will laughs,

“So if we like one of them we could be in by when? This weekend?”

“Yes. We can manage that round the visit with Mason and to Margot's grave don't you think? Actually he could help, it might normalise the transition too, for him and for Abigail”

“Are they paying you enough? Look, I have to go. We've had new stuff in. I've got lovely things to look at lined up the rest of the week which means there are some things I must get to today. Fortunately Cassie is helping, and is still very apologetic. Well. I suppose… ok even Jimmy is making faces at me, and he's got a high capacity for enabling love”

“Go, go. Goodbye Will.”

……

“Sarge? Can I ask you something?”

Tobias Budge sits back at his desk still trying to work out how some of the members of the contingency expected next week can be in three places at once on two of the afternoons according to the schedule or if it means the group is being split, and if so to what end.

“Sure. Private have a look at this, tell me what you think it means. Sit. Don't hover. Do you know where the boss is?”

Miriam takes the list from him and scans it,

“They've split them into language groups, maybe it's a reflective session?”

She hands the paper back to him, ok, damn, that was fast. She's good.

“Good point. Ok that makes more sense. I'll check where the Colonel should go. Maybe the Russians? You ok with the Middle East group?”

She nods,

“I don't know where the Colonel is, oh, maybe with the General? His guy pushed it back three times this morning. This is what I want to ask about”

“Ok. Oh. Is this the list for the formal?”

He reads down it.

“Oh. Yeah. I see what you mean. Damn. I wonder if that's a given?”

“Equivalent rank. I don't think I can go round and see his staff can I? See if we can be subtle about it?”

“What? Do I think it's a good idea to invite his most lowly junior out for muffins, front up, be really polite and make like it's good for everyone if the help can prevent a major melt down in public that will do no one any good and may permanently damage their boss’s career. Maybe even end it? I think I've got $20 in petty cash. Will that cover it? If not I've got another $15, actually make that $10 I want a muffin too, maybe a coffee as well. Can you buy a coffee and muffin for $5? Seems excessive but the prices outside the base? God”

Miriam smiles broadly. Damn if the Sarge knows which corners can be cut and risks taken and which really can't.

“What if the Colonel gets wind?”

“Ours or theirs?”

“Ours would be ok. Theirs?”

“I'll take it. I think I've got a good case. Even the General would buy. Actually it's his petty cash, he is buying”

His face twitches in a smile. Nice.

…….

“Ok. So. I talked to Miss Bloom, she says that they can arrange for you to have half an hour after school each day with the group to give me time to get to you and then get to the rental. And make dinner! Ok? What do you think?”

“Can we take our own things?”

“It will have furniture. But we can take anything we like at all. And it's not so far we can't get home to collect things. We’ll alternate weekends between here and Baltimore.”

“And will Hannibal come home for tea?”

“He might not make it for early tea but he will almost certainly make it before you go to bed. Probably in time for story. And be here for breakfast sometimes.”

She twists her face around. What a lot of changes.

“What if the dogs don't like it?”

“Who’s in charge here Abs?””

“You are”

“Too right. The dogs will love it. Did you have one you liked best? I can't promise it'll be that one but we can say? Have a look again while I make some eggs. Ok? You want sausage too? There's biscuits?”

She nods,

“Yes please. Beans?”

“Alright.”

……..

Will relaxes against Hannibal's side. Breathes a bit slower. He's so like a puppy happy to see his new Person. All waggy tail and grabby paws and licky tongue. He smirks a little. Especially the licky tongue! In a minute or two.

“So we all agree? I'll speak to Miriam tomorrow. I'll ask her to arrange viewing for the early evening. Shall I go or will you?”

“We could try and meet there? See it together?”

“Yes. Alright. How is Abigail?”

“Oh I threw you under a bus. I promised stories, and princess beds, and armour, and a light sabre, and total devotion and adoration, I may have hocked Mischa too, and possibly Murasaki and Godzilla.”

“You’re amazing. How are you?”

“Me? I'm getting everything I want. And some amazing bugs and terrible things over the next few days. Lucky at home, lucky at work. And I emailed Mason about maybe moving stuff, he's bringing a truck! Someone at his church apparently! A truck! He got excited about it! Unbelievable, should I wait for the other shoe to drop?”

“I know we don't always get the happiness we deserve, but you're permitted Will”

Will smiles and wriggles,

“I think, if we're really quiet we can be permitted right here?”

“Do you? But you're so noisy!”

“Shut up. Actually. I know how to shut you up”

He does. All licky tongue indeed!

……

In a dark room somewhere off the I70 a gloved hand closes and locks a door behind it. It's not ready yet. Soon.

“Roland? Is that you? What you doing? Can you come and help me?”

Roland rolls his eyes. God. Parents.

“I'm coming, mom”

He strips off the gloves and stuffs them in his pocket.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 40

Chapter Notes

> Little bit of hurt/comfort, Abi wise. Death may be an ending but it isn't the end. Helping children understand, that's a whole other story...

Miriam Lass hums to herself as she wraps yet another dog figurine in bubble wrap. Abi has an awfully large collection and apparently they are all coming along with them. She sits back on her heels, and then reaches over and scratches Winston behind her ears.

“Hey girl, do you wanna help pack too? You’d be very good at it. Or do you wanna go get me a drink?”

She can't help but smile when she hears Will’s voice from downstairs,

“Private Lass? Miriam, do you want some tea or coffee, oh wait, we've got some juice or squash? We've got some cookies too? Any good? Maybe? Can you hear me? Buster! get down.”

She pulls herself to her feet, stretches her back, and then hold the door open for Winston. As she walks down the stairs she dusts her hands,

“Hey Dr Graham, I'm just coming. Thanks.”

In the kitchen Will hands her a pack of cookies.

“I'm really sorry they're not home-made, sometimes we get round to it but these last few days, just the most ridiculous. We are so grateful you did all the organising. I gotta admit I feel a bit bad that not only did you find us the place you're also having to pack, how does that work? Does Hannibal basically own you? Is this modern slavery?”

Miriam laughs,

"No sir, though I can see why you might think so. I'm glad to help. If it makes life better for the Colonel, then ultimately it makes life better for Sergeant Budge and for me."

“Oh! Are we calling this enlightened self interest Miriam?”

She grins,

“I think we could Sir! Did Colonel Lecter tell you that I could come on Saturday as well? I've really got nothing to do, to be honest you’d be doing me a favour. He did say about going to the cemetery so I understand if you'd rather I didn't. But I'm really happy to help.”

Will looks at her for a moment. Considers, would it make it better or worse to have Miriam with them? Almost certainly better, maybe for Abigail, possibly even for Mason. And it wouldn't hurt him either.

“Are you sure Miriam? It might be a bit difficult. My brother-in-law is coming and he is still in a lot of pain. He’s a bit up-and-down so I can't say for sure how he will be. Actually, I can't really say for any of us how it will be. If you think you can manage, that would be great. I'm trying very hard to help Abigail deal with her own concerns and anxieties and not compound them further.”

“I understand Sir”

She sighs,

“I didn't say before, but I had a younger sister who died in an accident. I know it's not the same but I understand about grieving and just how varied it can be.”

He looks at her, standing there, army fatigues, hair tied back neatly, washed out dirty blonde, pale, tidy, normal,

“I'm very sorry Miriam. You just never know the grief and trouble other people are carrying around with them. If it won't hurt we’d be glad to have you. I know Abigail would find it really reassuring. Thank you.”

“Sir. And did you mention some tea?”

“Shit, I was too busy worrying about graves! Sure! Cup of tea coming right up! Do you have milk or do you have it the weird European way?”

…….

Sargeant Budge slogs through the list of invitees, checking the envelopes and inserts against the master list. Miriam went to see Colonel Brown’s staff, the junior being a young Private of nineteen harbouring something of a grudge against the Colonel. As far as Miriam could tell, just for existing. So the invitation is being issued but might be kind of ‘lost’ in the huge piles of mail that go through the office.

Tobias will take it. He thinks it's definitely the best outcome they could hope for. That or an accident with a bus. He told Frankie about it. She came out all guns blazing. Funny how the Colonel inspires loyalty even second hand. He carries on with his task. And why should he even notice that one of the addressees is Sir Anthony Dimmond and Dr Bedelia Du Maurier, or even know that it is worth noticing? The envelope goes in the mail sack along with the two hundred or so that have already been checked, double checked and crossed off. The next one is for Frankie, he glances round and then kisses it before putting it in the bag.

…….

“Cassie? Are you alright to check the cavities? I know it's a bit of a shit job”

“It's ok Dr Graham. I don't mind”

He looks at her,

“Cassie. I'm sorry about last week. I'm incredibly sorry if I said or did anything that could have led you to get the wrong end of the stick”

She goes red and doesn't reply and he's about to give up when she sighs,

“I'm really sorry. You were just nice to me. It seemed like. I don't know. A really nice idea. I even like kids.”

“That's sweet of you. Even if you haven't met my hell-spawn. Is Nick ok with everything, have you talked to him?”

“He was pretty pissed. But we have talked about it. Agent Crawford was actually pretty helpful in a ‘shit my dad says’ sort of way”

“I'm not sure I can even imagine it”

She shrugs,

“It's ok. Thanks for not pressing charges.”

“That's ok. He was just trying to do the big brother thing. If I had been being a shit he'd have been really brave to front up like that. Not sure about the nose though.”

“Did it bleed a lot?”

“Not much, and it gave Hannibal something to fuss about. Which was good as he'd come off a shit long flight and not enough sleep and he's always grouchy after. Even if he'd be horrified I said so.”

“He seems nice”

He laughs,

“What? When he's not threatening your brother or intimidating our colleagues?”

She smiles a little,

“I guess”

Her smiles broadens,

“He really did the whole ‘don't even think about it’ voice, very commanding and everything’

She sounds almost wistful,

“Cassie? Don't even think about it. Damn girl!”

She frowns and then bursts out laughing,

“Oh my god! I've got such daddy issues!”

Will stares at her and then joins in! Oh, my actual, god! And least she's smart enough to know it!

……..

“Abigail? Have you packed everything in your room you don't need tonight or tomorrow? Abigail? Abs? What are you doing sweetheart?”

She's standing beside the door to her room hugging the door jamb that surrounds the opening. Will realises she's crying and he sits down on the floor beside her and she climbs into his lap. He doesn't

say anything, just strokes her hair as she sobs against him.

“We won't be here if she comes back. She won't know where we are”

Oh.

“Honey, is this mommy?”

Abigail nods,

“Sweetheart. She always knows where we are. She just can't come and see us ever. We can think about her though. And go and see where they put her body. We’ll do that Saturday. Remember?”

“I want to see her! How do I know she can't come back if she doesn't say!!”

“I know, darling, I know. You remember all the good bits? Pancakes, and giggling and happy Saturday, and dancing in the kitchen?”

Abigail nods, still some tears.

“That's what's with us every day. All those good bits of mommy”

“And when she was sad?"

“And when she was sad. Still mommy. We had all of her. We were so lucky. It's only the physical bit, the body bit, that's not here with us. Otherwise she's with us all the time.”

“Promise?”

“Promise”

“I forget things. I forget”

“Shall I tell you what forgetting is all about?”

She nods again, and her bottom lip trembles,

“It’s to help make space for new bits of things. Things like new bits of happy. Mommy would like that. Something sad goes, new happy, something happy goes, still new happy squeezing it out. I'll help you remember the bits that we really need to remember. She loves you Abs, being gone, being dead, doesn't change that.”

“I don't want her to be dead”

“None of us do. It just happens sometimes.”

“Like the hamster”

“The hamster? Oh yeah. Like the hamster. Sometimes you just die. There isn't a good reason, or any reason. You just do”

“At school someone said a man killed mommy. Is that true?”

“We don't know. And that is the truth. She might have had an accident”

She nods.

“Hannibal won't get to meet mommy will he?”

“Not face to face. But we’ll show him her grave, and tell him about her favourite things, that's you by the way, and he will be friends with her through you and me, and Uncle Mason.”

“And Grandpa and Grandma?”

God help them,

“Them too. Yes. What made you think of it Abs? Is it because we're going to see her grave on Saturday?”

“Maybe. Uncle Mason is sad. But it was the pencil”

She points to the marks up the side of the doorway, marking off her growth over the first five years, first in one lot of handwriting, and the last three years in Will’s.

“They won't be at the new house”

“We’ll only be there for two months, then we'll be back here. They'll still be here. Hey shall we ask Hannibal to see if you've grown? What do you think? We could get him to write on the wall too? Then everyone who loves you that way gets their writing up there too?”

“Can we put him on the door too?”

She looks up the doorway, further up are the marks they'd made for Margot, and a little above them the marks for Will.

“Do you think he'll fit Abs?”

“I think so? We can try. He is tall.”

Will smiles and holds her close again, his lovely precious girl. Still haunted. Maybe Fred then? No shame in asking for help when it gets bigger than you. No shame at all. It'd be good if he not only believed it but acted on it too, for himself.

……

“Daddy! Daddy! Don't tickle! Hold me still, daddy, Hannibal don't cheat! No tip toes! No! Naughty! No! Don't put your head up! Stay still! No wriggling! NO! Very naughty….. ok, you are definitely the tallest.”

“And Buster is the smallest?”

She considers,

“Only in inches”

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 41

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The three bodies from West Virginia and Ohio are lying in the autopsy suite. They've already been catalogued and prepared and cleaned and made as ready as they can be for further investigation. There is also a body from Pennsylvania which may or may not be part of the series. Jack is trying to get a body back that they've already seen and released from further west.

“Did they come in with any other stuff? Or is this it?”

Jimmy looks up from his clipboard, he points towards the bench at the side,

“This is all we got. They simply didn't like to keep it. I can't think why.”

Will circles round the tables. This is going to take some time. And in theory they know when time of death was for each of the bodies or at least what the local coroner had estimated. So, in reality all he's looking for is other insect evidence which might indicate where the corpse was originally held, or whether it was transported, or if it was stored anywhere, and where it ended up. Before it was finally laid to rest. Cassie made a good start yesterday, but there is still a lot to do.

He sighs,

“Jimmy have you got the notes? I've got Cassie’s initial report. Has Brian had a look yet?”

“He’s had a look, I'm not sure if it told him very much. He'll be here in a bit, you could ask him then. He’s with Jack and Bev at the moment, maybe Frederick too”

“Oh, ok, are they working out what to say to Freddie?”

“I suppose so. If it turns out that all four are connected we are going to have people very worried, especially up along the I-70. What do you think Will is that the connector?”

“Honestly? I'm really just hoping for some residual insect carapace to give me a bit of a clue. Cassie's report says there is nothing particular of any note so I'm going to do a bit more probing and excavation."

Jimmy frowns.

“That's going to take a bit of time Will, don’t you have packing to do?”

Will smiles,

“Apparently that's what Hannibal has staff for!”

“Well lucky you! Last time we moved we used the U-Haul and had a major falling out with Brian's younger brother!"

“Yeah, but you were kind of waiting for that to happen weren't you?”

“Not the point Will!”

Brian and Bev come in through the door.

“Well that got sobering very quickly. Fredrick is worried that the coverage is actually pushing the guy to escalate a little. He's asking us to review the whole thing”

“What? He thinks the guy is breaking cycle?”

“He thinks he might be. It depends on whether that other body was or wasn't one of this guy’s”

“Please don't. I feel depressed enough already. Three, maybe four and two in the same county and no one spotted it?”

“Yeah. I know. We’ll do what we can. Will did you see the initial autopsy reports? They were all washed before they were examined”

“Of course they were. Because that nasty dirt might just be way too useful. Ok. It really is going to be cavities. Ok, Bev, you wanna help. We do all the heads first, then, come back around for the other orifices?”

“Will, darling, why didn't you say, that's exactly my kind of gig. Let's get to it. Break in two hours for lunch guys?”

There are nods. And they set to.

…….

“Darling? We've had an invitation to that NATO formal the Whitehouse are hosting? I'll have to show my face. Do you want to come, or shall I send an apology?”

Bedelia Du Maurier turns from her dressing table, but carries on brushing her hair.

“When is it?”

“The 23rd?”

“I think so. Will you check the appointments book. It's next to the telephone. If I'm free I'll come”

“Yes? There'll be dancing and so on, probably some speeches”

She smiles a little,

“That kind of party?”

He grins back,

“Probably. Might be a bit of fun though.”

“Do we know anyone else going?”

“Not that I know of. I'll check the book, send a note. I could call the Sargeant in charge of the list”

“Sounds like a good idea”

She turns back to the dressing table and lays her hairbrush down on top of the letter lying there. Opened but still in its envelope. From Brussels.

……

Roland Umber pushes the shop door open. Smiles vaguely at the guy slumped behind the cash desk and begins to browse the plants and greenery.

“What you looking for kid?”

“Me? Oh, mulberry, if you carry it?”

The shop assistant looks at him, weird thing for a teenager to want, what's that about?

“Ok. That's not odd at all. What do you want it for?”

“Do you carry it? I can try Schurrs if you don't”

The assistant gives him a singularly unimpressed look and indicates the tall bucket full of mulberry branches. Mainly used in high end floral pieces.

“$1.59 a stick. How many you want?”

“Ten for now. Thanks. How often do you get stock?”

“If you want it regular it’s better to order. Minimum is 20 sticks. Ok? That's $15:90.”

There guy rings it up and Roland nods. He’ll have to work it out. Maybe check Schurr’s as well. Online supply has already proved rubbish, he won't take that risk. He hands over a twenty and waits for the change.

…….

“Ok, Mason is going to arrive at 8:00 tomorrow, Miriam will be here at 9:00, she's got to get here from Fort Meade. I thought she was moving closer to Washington?”

“I think she is, but not for another week. Thank you for saying yes to her. She was very up-beat about it”

Hannibal puts down his knife and fork and rests them parallel on the plate in front of him. He's finishing off supper whilst Abigail has a bath and there will then be story and the usual go to sleep battles. At least it is the weekend, though it will come with its own set of challenges.

Will takes his plate and turns towards the sink,

“Did you know her sister died?”

“I did. It's in her file. Did she say much?”

“Just that it was an accident. I think she'll be good to have there with Abs.”

“You handled it well yesterday.”

“Do you think? I sometimes feel like I'm just stumbling around in the dark hoping not to put my fingers into a plug socket or the compactor! It did make me think I might talk to Fred, see if he thinks it's time for more help. Maybe after the weekend, see how it actually goes, rather than how I worry it will go”

“That seems sensible. I'm honestly surprised that I cannot think of anyone I might know that might know him from Johns Hopkins, he's not that much younger than me. But I'm reasonably sure we didn't overlap at all. Did he start out on the clinical side?”

“I think so. I'll ask him. Oh, we could get him to come to this lunch thing. Oh and for sure, that’s rapidly getting out of hand”

“Yes. I meant to say, Sargeant Budge asked if he could bring his girlfriend, Frankie I think”

“Sure, why not. I think we should make it a potluck and then make a main, a salad and a dessert in case everyone is totally lame and brings tatertot casserole and, I don't know, salad with jello and marshmallow”

“I hardly know where to begin with how awful that sounds. Really, a potluck? I can't say I've ever been to one”

“Excellent, you can co-host your first then. And spread the word amongst your lot. I'll tell mine. Oh, of course, I'm being slow, we can call it a housewarming!”

“Why not? I also meant to say I talked to General Davies. Will? Come and sit down. I'll make tea in a moment. No, not about the lunch, about the redeployment”

“Oh. Yeah? How does that work then?”

“Almost always to make this kind of move someone has got to be supportive of it higher up. My work is regarded as being above average, which is useful, I've got appropriate skills, the languages certainly don't hurt, and the whole settling down with someone is seen as a good thing. Stabilising. Wait. I can see you thinking. Matthew Brown could come back to bite me. It's my own fault. The General is concerned that we haven't been together long enough for him to be able to sell the whole deal. I know, terrible expression. The Adopt a Soldier aspect does work to our advantage though. He's a sucker for the romance of it. And he can see how it would play. I'm sorry to say he also sees Abigail as a big plus.”

He stops, waiting for Will to catch up with it all, slowly Will says,

“So, if we’re the model of devotion and lovey-doveyness and rock up at army events together and I pull the whole adoring partner with cute same sex family ready made, and manage not to smack Colonel Brown, and I make nice to the General and maybe kiss-arse a little, and basically model the whole adapt, evolve, become policy then we get to have you back full-time and permanently?”

“I'm sorry. That is a fairly accurate, comprehensive and succinct summary of the situation as the General sees it.”

“How tall would you say the General is?”

Hannibal frowns,

“How tall? Err, a little shorter than me, maybe about 72’’? Why?”

“I'm just trying to work out how low I have to kneel in order to kiss arse most effectively! Hannibal don't look so amazed. Ok, I wouldn't actually sell Abigail out to get you here faster, but I'm willing to be pimped out for it. You know? A little?”

Hannibal blinks at him,

“You do only mean that figuratively don't you?”

“I don't know?” He wiggles his eyebrows, “could I swing it with the General do you think?”

“Will! You are, oh, is that Abigail?”

“Yeah. It is. Hairwash Colonel. You promised.”

“I did. But don't think we aren't talking about this later!”

Will grins as he sits back in his chair,

“Oh, I'm banking on it”

…….

“That's soapy”

“Have you got your eyes closed properly”

“Yes. Daddy says I need a snorkel and goggles really”

“For bath time?”

“Uh huh”

“I used to wash Mischa’s hair when she was very little, I'm sure we didn't have this problem”

Will stands in the doorway,

“Here, I brought you some tea. It might be the hardness of the water. Abs, hold your breath and duck under, then we'll use some clean. God it's fantastic the new place has an actual hose attachment in the tub! How many jugs have we dropped all over the floor Abs? A lot?”

Abigail turns and looks at Hannibal,

“A very lot! Daddy, what's a hose? Like when we wash the dogs in the summer?”

Will has a mental picture of everyone being chased with water guns and the big garden hose in the summer.

“Just like that Abs”

She laughs and slops water up at Hannibal,

“That was extremely wet. You are not a little girl, you are a cephalopod.”

“Yes I am! What's a cephalopod?”

“What you are Abs. Come on, mush mush, up. Let's see if you can get dry faster than you got Hannibal wet. And I have to say Hannibal, you are working the whole wet tee shirt thing very effectively. Hey, wet! Hey! That's not fair. God. Ganging up on me now! I'm telling Aunty Mischa you know. I'm sure she's on my side. Hey!!"

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry there's been no update today. Terrible migraine this morning which I had to battle to finish an academic thing. And then no internet this afternoon and early evening which delayed other stuff.

Normal service resumes tomorrow.

And I've written 1800 of today's so I might get it done tonight. #notpromising

Adopt A Soldier AU - Part 42

Will is still battling with Abigail when the truck and her uncle arrives.

“Hannibal? I beg you. I'm throwing you under the truck. Go rescue Mason, and please grab the dogs. Bite Buster if you have to!”

“Daddy! No biting!”

“Abigail! No more dawdling. For goodness sake. Go finish getting dressed! Hannibal please!”

Hannibal makes a submissive gesture and heads for the porch door, outside his can see Will’s brother in law climbing out of the truck and looking now towards him, he heads out,

“I'm pleased to meet you Mason. I'm Hannibal, Will has spoken of you very fondly”

Hannibal is slightly surprised when the next thing that happens is that Mason pulls him into a close hug.

“Will is just the kindliest, nicest guy you could ever hope to meet. I am just so glad you both found each other. Now, you gonna help me load this here truck or you got people for that. You look a bit too tidy for carrying shit?”

Hannibal blinks in surprise,

“I’ll pull my weight. I think. Or rather the boxes? Come inside, it's either breakfast or brunch or the like. I believe waffles and pancakes are in order? What time did you leave this morning”

“Don't even ask. It was a terrible thing. I should've come last night but we had something at church. Will tell you I got religion? I have and then some. Changing me. For the good I think. We’ll see. Hey! Is that my girl! Oh my, it is my girl. Abigail Verger Graham you done got big on me! When did that happen?”

Abigail comes down the steps of the porch and begins to smile, when her uncle drops to his knees and opens his arms she rushes to hug him. He grins at her.

“I heard a rumour about waffles? Your daddy got the Iron out? That's good. Saturday waffles. Is there dancing?”

She looks a question at him and then her smile widens,

“I can play the tape!”

Hannibal watches them go into the house. None of the last five minutes were what he expected. He collects a box from the car, gives them a few minutes, and then follows them inside. There is a scratchy tape playing on an old machine, Abigail and her uncle already dancing, and Will and Miriam singing in the kitchen.

“Will? Singing and dancing and pancakes?”

“Yup. Apparently we're into the celebrate stage of grief. Honestly? I'll take it! This is one of Margot’s old tapes. She used to play it when she was feeling particularly good. Often associated with pancakes. And Saturdays”

Hannibal puts a hand on his shoulder, Will leans into him,

“Really? I might cry with relief. But we’ll see how the rest of the day goes. Mason says pack the van first, go grab lunch and then flowers, go to the cemetery, play some music, he made a tape! Then house, come back here, pack some more. Have take-out. Late night drop off. Miriam gets to sit Abigail while we do the second run?”

Hannibal puts his arms round Will further,

“Sounds about right. Anything I can do right now?”

“Set the table maybe? Oh, can you phone Bev and Jimmy. Tell them about take out. They'll be pissed if they miss out. Even if they can't come we should tell them”

Hannibal smiles and moves away, picks up flatware and plates from the dresser,

“About 19:00?”

“Yeah, great, but say 7pm or they'll just laugh”

He pauses for a moment between flips of pancake and a peek at the waffle iron,

“I love you Hannibal. Thank you”

…….

“Whatcha gonna do then? After the two months?”

“Go back out, to base. See what happens. Carry on.”

“You like it?”

“It's good for me. Structure, meaning. It's got purpose.”

Mason puts down the box he is carrying and stretches his back and then bends and picks it up again and hands it to Miriam crouched in the back of the small panel truck. On the side the truck is painted with a rainbow and has the words ‘have a little hope’ graffitied on it. Miriam hasn't decided yet whether the colourway is intentional or some reference to the Patriarch Noah.

“I get it. I've been a bit feckless. Still, might be back on track a little right now”

“Dr Graham said you started going to church. What's that like? You grow up religious?”

“Just the usual. Got turned right off it in my twenties, and Margot? Just made me mad. Now though? Found a good pastor, found some good people, found some things I can actually believe”

“Like what? I'm not being rude, I'm genuinely interested?”

“You got faith?”

“Jewish”

“Observant”

“A little. My parents? For sure. I don't know if Dr Graham said, he might not have done, I had a sister that died. Accident. Set us all back”

“I'm very sorry for that. I'm not into comparing. Grief is grief. Always someone got it worse than you. So what? Still hurts like heck.”

She nods, it's something she’s struggled with. There is always someone whose pain seems far worse than yours has any right to be. But it still hurts. Sometimes a lot.

“You're saying it's not the league table? Yeah, too many people are competitive about it. It's different for everyone. How much it hurts, and how you do or don't deal with it”

“You dealt with it?”

“Some. Some not. This is good for me”

“How long?”

“Six years”

“Fair enough. Ok then. Tell me if you can't say, what's your boss like?”

“Looking out for Will? Oh, of course, for Abigail”

“Both if I can”

“The Colonel is great. I'm not just saying it. Really. He's a good man. And I think he's shaping up to being a good daddy for Abigail. She loves him. Plain to see. He loves her right back”

“Will too?”

“Pretty much. You should have seen them when they were just a little late in Paris. He hid it but he was all over the place. Inside”

Mason nods, wipes his arm across his forehead,

“That sounds alright. Come on. Someone will make us a drink if we look real pathetic.”

“The Colonel will, he's good with strays and lost things”

She smiles. Yeah. Right. Her too. And the Grahams.

……..

Will glances out of the window of the Bentley and waves at Abigail, sitting in the truck between her uncle and Private Lass. They pull out of the cemetery grounds where Margot is buried.

“You know, I never even made out in a car before. When I was a kid”

“And your thoughts turn to this because?”

“Death and sex I guess”

“Not so unusual. All the inevitabilities of the flesh”

“Not so inevitable sometimes”

“You're right, I misspoke. I apologise”

“It's ok. And maybe not only the death and sex bit. This is a hella big car”

Hannibal smiles, it hadn't been his first thought when he bought the Bentley, but he can see the appeal.

“The front seats recline almost flat”

“Really? Do I sound like a teen in a bad young adult movie if I say I'm totally here for that?”

Hannibal laughs, he indicates and turns, the drive back from the cemetery helping things along, as they get further away.

“Not at all. Well. Perhaps. But I'm not sure that's such a bad thing. We could try if you like. A little later.”

“On the run back from the house?”

“I was thinking more on the later run back from the house. When Abigail is with Miriam and we don't have people waiting for us at either house.”

“Possibly smirking?”

“Possibly smirking”

“You're a lot of fun!”

“I told you some people find me amusing.”

“Yeah, I know. Just, I didn't quite expect it. You haven't forgotten about the no exhibitionism thing?”

“I think we can do better than a truck stop. I'll look at the map while we're eating part two of lunch.”

Will sits back in the passenger seat.

“Tell me about it?”

“Right now? I might need to concentrate on driving?”

“Oh. Yeah. Good point?”

“You might have some ideas?”

“I definitely do. I think I'll save them”

“You are a cruel tease. You have my interest”

Will smiles some more,

“Excellent. Later on then”

……..

“Will, would you like me to kill him, or would I just have to get in line?”

“Oh, I think there are a few people ahead of you in the queue”

“My pa, is a bastard. Have you shown Hannibal this?”

“I've tried very hard not to. I gave him the edited highlights and have managed some very nifty sleight of hand and distraction ever since”

“The others seen it? Your friends from work?”

“Yup. They've picked up the pieces for the last few years. They know the score. Part of me doesn't want to prejudice Hannibal before he actually meets Molson and your Ma.”

“Will, you're too kind to people, pa is just a shit. He doesn't deserve your consideration like this. Hell. I better talk to my pastor. It's too easy for me to get dragged back down into it.”

“What's he like? The pastor?”

“For a start it's a she. She's great. Takes no prisoners, got not time for mealy mouthed say one thing and do another shit. Actually reads the gospels and asks what's there not what other people say is there. Her favourite thing is love. She's all about it. Says there's enough hate and crap, what we want to go making things worse for people.”

“How'd that work for Hannibal and me then? She extend to that?”

“Yeah, I know. She ain't impressed so much with the whole anti-gay thing. Says it's not biblical. She's not that impressed with biblical as a reason anyway. She's got a lot to say about that”

“What does she believe then?”

“Not so bothered about that either. More interested in what people are doing and saying. It's refreshing. She's got no side to her. Popular fellowship, it’s growing. She's big on care, and compassion and I guess generosity of spirit. Cake too. She got a mission based on cake. Hell of a thing. I mentioned about you and Hannibal and Abs. She just laughed out loud. Said she hoped everyone would get to see how god could send everyone love even when their hearts had been sorely tried”

Will looks down at the paper cup he's been holding in one hand and Molson’s letter in the other. Both a little crumpled.

“I haven't shown Hannibal because it's so hurtful too. Why should he have to have a share in this shit?”

“Because he wants to. Because he loves you. Because he's here for you. Like the rest of your friends. Me too, if I can finally get my act together. I know I won't get it all right. Hell there's still crap. But I can see a way forwards now. Just a little”

“I'll think about it some more. Thanks Mason. You've done a great job today. It's helped Abigail enormously too.”

“It was a sweet thing when she sang that song and read that story to Margot”

Both men nod. It had been very moving.

“Our precious girl”

“Both of them”

…….

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 43

Chapter Notes

A loving reminder - Molson is a shit. We get to see the letter this chapter. He is a homophobic tosser. If that will upset you (and I wanted to smack him when I wrote it) please don't read beyond the happy smut. You'll only miss him being a tosser.

Oh yes, happy Smut! Some of this chapter is NSFW.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Bev is about to push into the master bedroom with yet another box when she realises that Will and Hannibal are already in there, talking quietly, so she dithers. She sees Hannibal take a card from Will, smile down at it, ask him something, nod at the reply, and then put it into a small silver business card case he pulls from his pocket. Oh. One of those drawings.

She smirks a little and waits just a few moments more as Hannibal runs his hands through Will's hair and then kisses him. Ok, then, a good drawing! Wow, really good, ok, come on! Jeez guys, get a room! Oh, yeah. It is your room. She knocks,

"Hey, stop snogging, there's still at least ten boxes to decant. Some of us don't want to pander to your sorry behinds for the whole evening! Ok that's came out wrong"

"Oh my god Bev, don't you even knock?"

"I knocked. You were distracted. Good technique Hannibal, distraction technique, not kissing technique, though hey, what do I know. That kinda looked ok too. Shit. This whole thing went bad fast. Where do you want this box?"

"I'll take it Beverly. The box I mean. Oh dear. Yes, gun jam of a conversation"

He takes the box from her, glances down at the flaps and then juggles it onto a hip and checks the label, in Miriam's small, neat, script.

"Your box again I believe, Abigail's room"

She takes it from him and it's only as she's putting it in Abigail's new bedroom that she realises that she didn't even think to question his request. Damn! Good job Colonel!

…….

"Do you know where we're going to stop?"

"I do"

"Not going to go for the 'oh dear, I ran out of petrol' thing?"

“If you like? Would it add to the verisimilitude for you?”

“Nah. I'm good. Just a little bit excited I think”

Hannibal huffs a small laugh,

“I've only one suggestion to make”

“Only one?”

“Well, maybe more than one. But the principle one is that we make use of the passenger’s seat and not the driver's seat”

“You've thought that through? Ok, I'll bite? Why exactly”

“I'm concerned about accidental triggering of the horn”

Will has a sudden mental picture of him sitting astride Hannibal, pushing himself up and down, Hannibal buried balls deep in his arse and him hitting the horn on every downwards thrust. He starts to laugh. Hannibal smiles,

“I thought you'd enjoy that picture. About ten minutes from here. Alright?”

Will watches the road pass through the window. The almost total dark. Passing through what might just be fields or possibly some light industry.

“I wonder if you might grant me something?”

“Really? Almost certainly? What?”

“You showed Mason the letter. Do you think you might show it to me now?”

Will sighs,

“I told him I was trying not to prejudice you against Molson before you had to meet him”

“I understand that. I'd still like to see it. Will, remember the soldier bit, I like to have a little forewarning of what I’m up against.”

“I get it. Ok. Later then”

“When we stop”

“Hannibal. It's a hell of a mood killer”

“Nothing could be with you”

Will chews his lip a little over that,

“Ok, that was pretty smooth. I'll give you that”

“And the letter?”

Out of the corner of his eye Hannibal can see Will debating with himself. Up ahead he sees the small run off the road, leading to a field gate he'd identified from google earth as being a possible candidate. It's actually better than he'd hoped. Secluded, but not desolate. Better than car park six bay five for a first. Or even that truck stop. He smiles. And pulls off the road.

Will looks at him and then quietly pulls the letter out of his pocket and hands it over. He makes a conscious effort not to wrap his arms round himself and then realises the futility of it. He should be taking all the comfort he can, wherever it may be found.

Hannibal reads the letter twice. Will watches him. He knows the countours of Hannibal's face now. He can see some tightness gathering round his eyes, his mouth twitching a little. Yeah, he's not wild about it. But when he's done he folds it, puts it back in its envelope and then reaches into the back of the car for his jacket and puts the letter inside.

“I see no reason why you should have to carry this round any further. We share everything Will, I'll share the carrying of this too. Now, I think the easiest thing is for you to slide out of your pants, and then I'll migrate across the console. I've left the seat warmers on. We should be comfortable”

“Really? Just like that?”

“Of course. I'm not going to pay a small mind any more than a small amount of attention. You though? You have all my attention. Yes?”

Slowly Will manages,

“Yeah. Yeah I think so, yeah. Oh my god. For sure!”

“Pants then. I think I'll manage with just my buttons”

“Fucking hell Hannibal! I said making out”

“First base Will? Second? Darling, you should know by now, I hit for a home run every time”

There's a certain amount of wriggling around and elbows almost in faces until Hannibal is seated in the reclined passenger seat and Will minus his pants and underwear sitting astride him as in the little picture he'd drawn. He's kept his shirt on, though the buttons are undone. No undershirt. Hannibal's own shirt is also undone his tee shirt pushed up so Will can rest one hand there against his chest.

“Like this? Good. Kiss me first. Then maybe one hand on my shoulder and perhaps the other against the roof, just to push against.”

“What about you?”

“I think I'll have both hands busy, just opening you up, maybe a certain amount of teasing? I'm sorry I'm not flexible enough to suck you and fuck you at the same time”

“Hannibal! God! I'm a bad influence! Ok. Maybe suck me a little first?”

“Good Will. I adore it when you ask for what you want. If you kneel up a little I'll be able to do that and make you ready? Yes? You'll probably need to mind your head. I know. I treat you like a tiny delicate blossom but I've only a few inches on you, there's not much head room”

“I'll manage! Oh wait, which kind of head? Was that a sex pun?”

Hannibal smiles and pulls him closer to kiss,

“Are we starting now?”

“Any other requests?”

“If I come too soon I might get a bit too stressed, prostate wise, it might go all a bit funny”

“The synethesia?”

“There's a bit of a line between what's really just the edge of it being amazing, pushing over into feeling desperate but not in a good way?”

“So, I'll try not to swallow you down too much, and we'll save you for when we're both closer?”

“You're so considerate”

“Yes I am. Ready now? Are you content for me to be a little directive? I could use my hands to move you round a little?”

“A bit of guidance?”

“Your car based making out is limited”

“And yours is so extensive. Actually is it? Maybe I don't want to know?”

“Not for a very long time. Possibly thirty years.”

“Ok. Can we? Kisses first?”

“Kisses”

There's kissing. And sucking. And a certain amount of heavy desperate clinging. The roof gets its fair share of abuse as Will pushes against it and makes high keening noises. Hannibal has to force himself not to bring Will to a shuddering climax around his fingers and down his throat. Oh, the oral satisfaction of bringing such pleasure to someone in whom you delight.

When they're finally solidly engaged in being as close as they can be to each other in every physical way possible Hannibal can feel Will’s cock pressed between them, can feel Will’s wet kisses and slippery sliding tongue searching his own, can feel one of Will’s hands pushed under his hip pulling him closer the other round his neck to steady himself against the headrest and to hold him near for kissing. His own hands spread along Will’s back and arse, under the shirt. He manages to pull back and Will rests his own face against his arm.

“Close?”

“Yeah.”

“With me then?”

Will nods against his neck.

“Home run”

Hannibal laughs. Faster then. The home run is achieved amidst breathy laughter and exhalation and small exclamation.

“Oh. My. God.”

“My Will”

Hannibal is sufficiently prepared that not only had he remembered some lube in a little packet they'd managed to open and not spill everywhere, but he'd also remembered some wipes, stored in the central console.

“What's my arse and cock going to smell of? Oh. Aloe Vera? That's not so bad”

“Better?”

“Cleaner and better. Perfect Hannibal, really, one for the memory palace”

“My love. I'll set the cell for ten minutes time. I think we deserve some post coital cuddling”

“It's ok, I'm ok. We can just..”

“Will, I'm not asking for you? I'd like it. Please?”

“Oh. Shit. Sorry. I always roll over. Why didn't you say. I'd like to, nearly always”

“I'm saying now.”

They move to get comfortable on the seat. Hard to tell in the dark where one of them begins and the other ends. The windows are mostly steamed up now. Hard to see anything beyond them, or even themselves looking back. Hannibal closes his eyes when Will snuggles against him. The heady feel of home.

…….

In Hannibal's jacket in the back seat it's almost as though Molson’s letter could burn a hole in the pocket.

Hell Will,

I don't even begin to know what you are fuckin’ thinking. What the very merry goddam hell. I ain't even got words for how mad I am with you right this minute. How in tarnatin effin swamp rats could you? Who the hell is this guy? How’d you find him? I talked to Mason, he said it was some damn Soldier Program. I have to tell you I'm gonna be having words to them. They can't be allowed to do this. I'm not having my little girl exposed to this kind of thing.

You might think you've got rights because you her pa. But we're her goddamit grandparents, we've got rights too. I don't think you appreciate the situation you going to find yourself in. I'm going to speak to a lawyer don't think I won't. I talked to Mason’s Ma, don't think you're going to find an ally in her neither. Nor Mason. He's been going to church like a good son, saw sense at last. You'll see, his preacher guy will talk to him. Then we'll see if he can talk some sense into you.

My girl might of been wrong, but at least she had the wits to get married. And have that little girl. I gotta say this kinda makes me wonder if my Margot didn't know this about you all the time. Maybe she knew you was turned. Maybe that's what drove her sad. Oh I know what the doctor said. But this makes a whole lot of sense to me.

And Abigail? What kind of thing is this going to be for her? Have you thought about her at all? You going to be going around with a smile just fornicating. It's sodomy Will! The bible says it ain't right. And all the kids at school now? Hell boy, are they are going to sit around making like this is nice and normal. And her teacher! What she's gonna say? Two daddies coming to parents evening? I don't think so. You are creating a whole world of pain. And it's just thoughtless of you. How could you do this to Abs? Ain't she been hurt enough by what's happened? Have you had one thought for her? Or is it all about you? And whatever the hell it is that you goddam want.

Is this a sex thing? I always thought you was a little weak. That you didn't know how to look after Margot properly. But I never thought you were this way. Don't you know how this is going to look. Everyone going to think that Margot left because you couldn't see her right. They're going to blame you Will. And frankly, right now, I think I do too.

She would never have had to leave if you looked after her right. I ain't saying you got her killed. But you put her in the way of it. How could you Will? I think you know I mean it when I'm saying this ain't over. Really!? We don't wanna see you on spring break, but I guess we ain't got no choice over it. You can't keep us from Abs. She needs her grandpa and her grandma. You better not try and get in the way of it. There will be hell to pay if you make any effort to stop her from coming. But the less I see of you the happier I'll be. And if I see the guy? Anywhere near Abs? You better know it, I will kill him.

Mason says he's coming down to see you and Abs for Margot's third. You better have something sensible to say to him. I ain't having it Will, I ain't. You'll see.

Molson

……..

Miriam hands her boss a cup of tea. It's not quite as late as she'd expected. Still they'll have a busy day tomorrow even if all the major stuff has gone. There's always small things to trawl for round a house. Even if they can come back and pick up more things as needed.

"Private Lass, thank you. Now, how are you getting back to Fort Meade?"

"I parked round back of the barn Sir. I'll be fine. It's a straight run from here"

"If you're sure. I'm sure we could find you some space. The put you up is reasonably comfortable"

She smiles at him over the rim of her own cup, that doesn't sound like the voice of experience.

"Kind of you. But easier to make the journey tonight, and then tuck in to a solid nine."

"Nine? Sounds like heaven. We're very grateful Miriam, this really was above and beyond"

"Not at all sir. I was glad to help. Honestly it was good to meet Mr Verger. And actually it was a useful reminder."

Hannibal nods at her. She doesn't really need to explain.

“Nevertheless, thank you. I'll see you on Monday?”

“Sure thing Sir. I'm gonna spend tomorrow packing my own box. It's given me the appetite for a little homeliness. I'll take the apartment offer. They said I could any time. Might even help some. With being back and all”

He smiles at her some more. She will go far. And he might even be able to help a little.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for you lovely kind comments folks. Sometimes I just have to battle the migraine or I'd be prostrate like a character from a Victorian romance all the time. And not in a charming way...others of you who have chronic conditions will know the shitty balance between meds and feeling ok except drugged to the hilt, and feeling awful some of the time but you can actually think.... in other news I think we're about to finalise on the flat rental #ohmygod #squeee #whatarelief

Adopt A Soldier AU - Part 44

When Miriam wakes up she looks at the small cardboard box on the the table in her room. They've been here less than a week and she's already accumulating junk. She does this. She knows it. Seeking reassurance in things. Things that are distracting. From the ache of loss. Ok, maybe some time for a little recycling, or regifting. She takes one or two photos of things she especially likes. Taking up space in the cloud rather than in her brain and room.

It doesn't take long, it has only been a week after all. Better to get a handle on it early. She smiles to herself and thinks of Abigail's collection of little dog figurines. They're both a protection and a charm too. No harm in it, but easy to miss what the collection means when the sheer appeal of little doggies is so easy to see.

…….

At a desk in the living room Bedelia Du Maurier looks through the window down their untidy garden and out over a narrow corner of the Potomac river. In front of her opened and spread out is a letter from Mischa. She touches it now but doesn't re-read it. She considers, the words may now be inscribed on her heart, bleeding just a little from their sting.

There are so many ways she could choose to proceed from here; take the risk of stepping beyond the protection she carefully cocoons herself within? Allow someone else to step with her behind the human veil of her carefully constructed life? Allow love to move her like the sun and other stars?

Out in the garden she can see the early budding of leaves and some brave flowers battling the chill and overwintering. She smiles to herself, nothing ventured, nothing gained,

>My dear Mischa,

I'll admit to having been surprised to receive your letter. If I were to be completely honest I would say perhaps a little dismayed. You were very clear when last we met. And I have continued to appreciate your clarity.

Of course that it not to say I don't appreciate the sharp ache your ongoing absence causes me. You well know the nourishment my soul receives simply by being in your orbit. Are you now going to put us both through hell again? Anthony continues as ever, and though I appreciate your neat side-stepping he would not see the trouble inherent in the position he created.

My dear, if Hannibal is here we shall certainly run into him. There is nothing I can do to prevent it. And whilst I shall not force it sometimes it is better to confront the beast than for ever to live in fear of it. Would he really be so unforgiving? If, as you say, he has truly found love, well, I might argue that there's none so dangerous, but I also think it might soften him in many respects. And he loves you well. Perhaps we are neither of us as generous as we might be with him?

If they offer you the opportunity to come. I hope you shall. If nothing else I should be glad to bear the sweet and bitter joy of your presence. There, I've said it, I miss you Mischa. I miss you. Reckless of me isn't it? Righteous too. I continue to believe in our rightness. And if you can be persuaded, I cannot think why you should expect me to do otherwise.

Perhaps that was your intention in writing? To let yourself be persuaded? Of course if I see Hannibal I shall not force your hand. I am not so minded. But my darling are we to play again? I know it is more than a game, it is our lives. But it is a pretty play. And as I say, I miss you.

Yours, and how true those words are,

Bedelia<

She reads it once. Commits it to the inside of an envelope, addresses it, locates her folder of postage and stamps it, it could go in the diplomatic bag but better to go in plain clothes. She smiles to herself at the image. She lets it sit there a moment and then takes its protaginator and commits that carefully to a tied bundle in a usually locked drawer of the desk. No need to be careless. Well, not in this respect at least. Of course Anthony wouldn't especially care, but that's half the point. She is in a situation where she actually does.

…….

“Molson honey there's a lady here, she knows Mason from church. She brought cake. Come down hon, it's a cutting cake and all”

Mason’s mother turns towards the nicely dressed and smiling woman,

“Did you make this? I can hardly believe it. You must do so well?”

Reba Mclane smiles wider, it's not unusual for people to be impressed that anyone without the use of their eyes can function above the level of a three year old. And sometimes she'd be ready to school this soft and fading lady all about it, but not today.

“I find as long as I've clearly marked the salt, the baking soda, and the powder I can usually get by. Oh and the sugar too. There's been one or two incidents with icing I'd prefer not to tarry over!”

Both the women laugh. Cake making is modern witchcraft. And having the spell of it is a magical thing.

“Will your friend come in from the van?”

“He's a little shy. He don't say much, but he's got a good heart, an infinite capacity of imagination too. He might get on with your husband I think. I might ask Mr Verger if he'd be willing to have a little chat? Might be of some help in coaxing my friend back to life?”

“Oh my, did something bad happen? Maybe I shouldn't pry?”

“Mason has spoken freely to me, I'm sorry, I know you’ve had your share of pain. My friend has got lost in his some. His Ma. It was a sad and awful thing. Harder still as they didn't get along.”

She stands as Molson comes into the room and extends her hand towards the clatter that he makes, Molson glances quickly at his wife, and she makes a sharp abbreviated nod,

“I'm Molson Verger, Mason’s pa. You from his church and all?”

“I am sir. Your wife and I are talking the merits of good cake. Mason has talked a lot about home, about you both. I found I couldn't hardly wait to meet you.”

Molson looks her over, her clear unseeing eyes, her friendly and plain speaking tone, her well dressed hair. Her smile.

“You didn't have to come all this way to see us”

He winces at the bad phrasing but doesn't rush to correct himself.

“I know. But on a Sunday? Is there a better time to visit? The lord loved a good visit with his friends. And I'm hoping that we shall be”

Molson laughs,

“You pitch a good case. And if you bring cake, I'll not make any effort to turn you away. Who’s the guy in the van”

Molson's wife interjects,

“He's a little ornery by the sound of it. Struggling.”

Molson nods, for all that churches attract the strong they also have their fair share of the halt and the lame.

“I'll take him out some cake then. Marissa honey will you cut him some and I'll get him a drink too. Will he come inside?”

“Probably not, but he'd be glad of some coffee if you're willing, he thinks tea is for invalids or only iced and in the summer. He's no tolerance for it”

Molson laughs and a few minutes later has a plate and mug in hand,

“What's your friend's name?”

“Oh he's got a common enough name, it's Francis, he doesn't care for it, but really, in the church, everyone knows him as Dragon”

“Dragon?”

“I know. What can I say, he has a big imagination and a fondness for the words of St John.”

All three of them laugh. Marissa notes how when the lady laughs her whole face lights up. Shining there in their small kitchen where the shadows are from more than just the dim wattage of the bulb. Molson chuckles,

“I beheld a great red dragon, and a woman clothed with the sun?”

“That's it. You’ve got your book by heart then?”

“Only the finest parts. There's powerful words and then some”

“Yes” Reba smiles “powerful truths. Why Mr Verger I think we shall be friends. And if you can give a hand with Dragon that would be a worthy thing”

“Is that why you're here then?”

“Oh, I was curious, I'm not above admitting that. And I thought you'd both like cake. And then when Francis said he'd drive me, well, I thought here was a way that a different good might well be done”

Molson nods, it's not a bad thought,

“Good enough for me. Marissa, you make something more to drink, I'll go have a word with this Dragon”

He nods, though Reba cannot see him do it and when he's gone Marissa turns to her and speaks low,

“Do you think there's hope?”

Reba reaches out a hand to her across the table which Marissa takes,

“Marissa honey, I mean it when I say I do believe there's always hope. Look at you and Mason? Hope is a seed that needs love to grow. Molson won't know what hit him. Dragon is a powerful force for love. You'll see. He's got the pain, but he knows all about change and growth”

Marissa glances outside, to where Molson is speaking through the open window of the van, both arms resting on the wound down glass.

“Change?”

“And cake. We know the healing power of cake. It opens doors that the book doesn't. All the big changes in the Word happen over food. You go back and read it again. The lords ministry was one of cake.”

Marissa smiles. Reba McClane, pastor of Mason’s church is about as charismatic as any she's ever come across. Planting hope. Nourishing it even on stony ground. Like her Molson’s heart.

…….

In his bedroom Roland Umber carefully shrouds one of his three big glass tanks. He'd found each one of them at local junk shops or yard sales. Now they're just a ticking glowing presence in his room.

Inside each one is the low sussuration of sound that suggests something living, waiting, growing. So beautiful he thinks. So very beautiful.

…….

Will finishes his meal and swivels in his chair to put the plate and flat-ware next to the sink,

“And we shall do this all again in two months time. God. I hate moving. Oh, that'll be why I haven't done it for years”

Abigail swallows a mouthful, hmm, eggs and something green. She'll have to eat the green. Her daddy has a thing about growing foods.

“Hannibal? Daddy says you’re a terrible influence.”

Hannibal looks at her in some surprise,

“Me! I cannot even begin to think of why. What do you mean Abigail?"

Abigail smiles as she carries on eating her supper. She'd overheard Will talking to Beverly on the phone earlier,

“He said you played baseball in the big car. That's very naughty. I don't think it's big enough really.”

Hannibal puts down his knife and fork and raises his eyebrows in Will’s direction, Will has the good grace to blush and has a go at his best puppy dog face, Hannibal rolls his eyes,

“Abigail, I may be a bad influence but your daddy is in a whole other league”

…….

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 45

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Did you hear what she called you?”

Hannibal pauses, enjoying Will koala-ed snug against his back, head buried between his shoulder blades, arms tight round him.

“I did. She was almost fast asleep at the time”

“Hannibal she was awake enough to be demanding sleepy Godzilla bedtime milk.”

“As I recall so were you?”

“Couldn't sleep”

“Worried? Will? About?”

Will burrows further, hoping maybe he could just live inside the safe cage of Hannibal's ribs.

“Molson. This killer guy. Abigail. You.”

“Go on?”

“I didn't actually tell Bev anything, I just made a joke that baseball was the new 'No Hello Kitty' euphemism”

“I didn't complain Will”

Will pauses again,

“Oh.”

“I may not extend to exhibitionism but I'm content for your friends to know we're compatible in all respects”

“I love your turn of phrase”

“May we go to sleep? The milk should be taking effect now?”

“You're right. I think it is. ‘Night love”

Hannibal smiles,

“Goodnight Will”

Will wriggles a little,

“Daddyball”

“Wretched man”

“‘S cute. I might remind her in the morning”

There's a quite a long pause and Hannibal thinks Will may have finally gone to sleep. He breathes a little looser. Lets himself drift.

……..

There are only so many places Mischa can have filed the relevant folder. And only so many places she can look for it. She has not doubt it will be in the last but one place. Last but one because almost certainly she will be able to think of yet another place she might have found it had the need arisen to keep going. But she's not there yet. She kicks the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet. The lock has always been a little tricky. The top drawer springs open, as if in relief.

Inside is the folder she'd been looking for. Either she's getting forgetful or the new intern is just that little bit too efficient. Elsie? Ellie? Elise? One of those. Nice. Quiet. A demon with paperwork.

Mischa sits behind her desk. The room is really rather small for someone at her rank. But the tiny half window and its view of the currently rainy square and single plane tree makes it all worthwhile. Ahh, yes, the rain. Since moving to Brussels she's had nine umbrellas. She’s always leaving them somewhere, to dry, over the back of a chair, in a taxi. Once, in Bedelia’s apartment. She rather hopes Bedelia took it with her to Washington when Anthony was re-assigned. There's something rather comforting to think of her umbrella keeping Bedelia dry during the Washington winters and springs.

She looks at the paper work on her desk. Really, she could swing it quite easily. If she wanted to. It would be easy as well to make the excuse of seeing Hannibal and Will and Abigail. But Mischa isn't usually one to shy away from tricky territory. She's a good negotiator usually, known for it, in the relevant corridors of influence and complicated budget deals and conventions that are the European Commission.

So then, Bedelia?

……

“What you listening to?”

Will carries on looking up bug scale against his reference text on screen. Jimmy leans in and carefully removes an earbud.

“Hey, Jims. Sorry! The music? How would it be if I said the Beatles?”

“Very bad. Don't do it to me Will. Really?”

“Mozart. Hannibal wants to go to some performance in New York.”

“Yeah? You into it?”

“Sure. The Magic Flute? All that crazy Masonic symbolism? And amazing music. The little birds? If I thought Abigail wouldn't yawn all the way through the second half and fidget something terrible I'd take her.”

“What about a matinee? Maybe they do afternoon performances?”

“Actually, that's an excellent idea. I'll suggest it to Hannibal”

“He wouldn't mind? Date with daddy on his own and everything?”

“I'll ask him. And the great thing is if he did want to go with just the two of us he would actually say.”

Jimmy mimes a minor heart attack,

“What! Actual adult communication and shit? Will, I've said it before this guy might be a keeper”

Will doesn't say anything, just smiles a little,

“Will? Shit! Really! Are you seriously thinking about it?”

“Maybe. Do you want to know what Abigail called Hannibal yesterday?”

Jimmy smiles, gives Will the whole grabby hands thing, Will laughs,

“Daddyball”

“You're kidding me? God. Marry him. For fuck’s sake. Oh and I want to be top table, maybe an usher? Or a flower boy. With Sargeant Budge.”

“I knew you wouldn't let me forget that slip-up!”

“I won't. Wow. Home run Will” he winks and skates over the moment “Ok. Back to boring. Brian, god love him, wants to know if there's more?”

“He asked exactly the same question three hours ago.”

“I know.”

“And two hours ago”

“I also know”

“And just under an…”

Jimmy holds a hand up,

“Don't shoot the messenger. Anything?”

“I'm waiting for the damn things to soak. I can't get them open dried, they'll just disintegrate. Tell him to be patient. It's probably a coincidence. Well, it might be.”

In three of the five corpses a single Lepidoptera pupa had been found right down the back of the throat. Didn't seem like random chance, not really. And they are probably the three most recent dead. The lab consensus so far is that the guy might be escalating. It fits with Frederick’s theory, and if it is, then they've got a bona-fine serial on their hands. It’s making Jack twitchy. The rest of the lab team too.

“What about the exteriors Will? Anything there?”

“Same initial findings, same species. Probably Acherontia. We'll see soon enough. Well. Give it another few hours. Time Jimmy. Time.”

……

“Pa? I didn't expect to see you? How's it going?”

Molson looks at his boy, looks up at the peeling siding of the church, looks at the ladders and the four or five guys hanging round, having a smoke, drinking joe.

“Dragon said you'd be painting today. Said you'd got more ladders than folks.”

“Sure. You know how it is. Weekday. People working. Or with their kids. Or, just household stuff”

“I got the time”

“Me too, Pa. Dragon’s inside. Making a new brew. You wanna go see? There's pancakes too”

Molson smiles, pancakes and a little syrup is like music to his ears. He nods at Mason,

“You want me to bring you back a re-fill? Or a roll-up?”

Mason smiles. He can remember going to school with a couple of rolled up pancakes with jelly, all done up in greaseproof paper, to snack on, or more usually, because he loved to sleep until the very last minute, to eat for breakfast.

“Like when we were kids? I'd like that Pa, it's a good memory”

Molson nods, pauses, but doesn't say anything and heads inside. Mason sets to stirring the big can of paint he's just prised the lid off. Good memories can be made. For the future, of the present.

Inside Reba is laughing with Dragon and several other members of the church, she's trying to toss a pancake. Molson watches her. No fear on her face as she flips it. Not even a little teeny flip but straight up, high. It comes down and she just catches it by the edge. There are hoots and applause.

“Dang, girl. You did that mighty fine!”

“Mr Verger! This is just great. Actually that was my sixth go! The rest? Well let's say the local raccoon is going to be very grateful!”

“I like your perseverance ma’am. I'm here to do a spot of painting or ladder holding. If that's alright?”

He glances round the room. Six people, Reba and Dragon included, all looking pleased to see him. That ain't happened in a while. Dragon hands him a cup of coffee, grins at him, a little shy about his slightly twisted lip. Molson wants to tell him it's so barley noticeable that if no one had said anything he'd actually not have realised. He catches himself. Thinks about the shape of that feeling. What is that? That's kind of? It's a slippery thing what ever it is. Maybe he'll catch it again later.

“Thanks. Smells greats. And really I'd have had the raccoon's if it wouldn't have deprived him.”

He pauses a moment,

“Or her”

Reba smiles at him again,

“We won't deprive either of you. Plenty for all. When people want to share. Plenty”

……

Roland watches as one of the chrysalis splits. He'd missed the other three, had to pretend to be running a fever to get to stay home today. Worth the hands round the kettle and the dusting of talc on his face though. And his sister’s blusher stuff with the scratchy brush. God. Weird.

The moth crawls out of it's all too brief home, stretches its wings slowly, slowly, slowly, letting them fill. Soft now but they'll firm up. So beautiful. Acherontia Styx. The lesser Death’s Head Hawkmoth, its green and brown, gold and black colouring so beautiful and deadly. A scent imitator, honey sweet, to enable it to rob hives and bee colonies in the wild. With a tiny human skull on its back. A glorious accident of nature. So very, very beautiful. Roland watches, utterly enthralled. Better than school.

…….

In Paris, Simonetta, Hannibal's mother, sits at the kitchen table. It's warmer here than in most of the rest of the house. Their elderly maid is making a tarte tatin. The scent of baking cinnamon and apple and sweet pastry making her hungry already. Though lunch is several hours away.

“Have you seen the Count this morning?”

“Since breakfast?”

She shakes her head,

“Last time he was in the library. I think”

Simonetta smiles and unfolds herself from the almost comfortable kitchen chair. Really they will have to have the basket seats redone this year, or next. Or head to one of the second hand shops on the Seine. Actually maybe they could do a swop? It's just possible the current chairs might fetch more than newer ones with their degree of venerable decrepitude.

On the ground floor she hunts through several rooms until she finds her husband with a cleaning cloth, several hard bristled brushes, some wax polish and some vile smelling metal cleaner.

“What are you doing? Why is the fox down?”

Simonetta indicates the large taxidermy Fox her father in law shot after it ate his favourite cockerel. Until then they'd had a laissez faire relationship, despite one or two chickens going missing, but the cockerel was a whole other matter.

“I think she has a little moth. Really, Simonetta, do you think it might be time to get rid of some of the more gothic accoutrements?”

“I was just wondering that about the kitchen chairs”

The Count smiles,

“Is this Abigail's letter?”

“I think it was more the pictures she drew”

The carefully written letter had come with three drawings; of Hannibal's Baltimore home, of Will and Abigail's home, and of the new place they are all renting. At that point they hadn't actually moved but Abigail had seen the brochure on the real-estate agent’s website.

“I can't believe they will actually want this stuff. And really! When did Hannibal's taste get so macabre?”

“The antlers? That was your parent’s”

“Oh no. Not the one from Como? It's worse and bigger than I remember”

“Trying to diminish its awfulness in your mind?”

“Perhaps. Who would make such a thing?”

“And the table decoration?”

“Oh surely that's your side’s?

They both laugh. Then look at the desk and it's range of objects rather more soberly.

“I think we should box the whole lot and take them straight to some arcade.”

“Sure?”

“No, of course not, but for goodness sake. I don't want to give the child nightmares!”

The Count nods. Ahh, but she's still his darling girl. Thinking like a grand-mere now, and making plans. Well done Will, bravo. He must tell Murasaki. She will be quite smug about it all.

Chapter End Notes

In a 'oooh, numbers' fashion. This fic has had a hit for every ten words written. Corrr. Readers really rock! I should write some more. I'll go write some more.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 46

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The letter in his briefcase is almost more of a siren call than he can bear. Over breakfast that morning Will had muttered that he'd left an envelope for Hannibal for him to read later, during the day, when he had a free moment.

“Will?”

“I miss writing to you. I thought I'd remedy that. And after the thing with the text I decided this was a better idea!”

They both smiled. Hannibal had utterly forgotten what NSFW meant which had almost caused an international incident. He'd glanced at his messages during a brief lull in a meeting with various European senior finance staff, and had practically choked on his coffee.

“I'll look forwards to it then”

“Good, you should, oh. Oh yeah, Molly’s collecting Abs today. She's got a sleepover with Lily. I've got a stupid amount of catch up to do. The moth thing? Really pushing us back. We've got to do a review of any cases with any kind of deliberate insect deposition. It's a killer. Half the files don't even record whether the presence is intentional or not. And what we do if it is. Brian's got a plan and I’ve got a guy at the Smithsonian I’ll maybe get to see later this week.”

“You'll come to Washington?”

“Yeah. Maybe Thursday or Friday. Oh, can you be free? We could have lunch, if you like?”

“I would like. Friday would be slightly easier. Would you like to meet General Davies too? He'd be interested in meeting you.”

“Hannibal! What! Warning me in advance about possible mealtime companions?”

Hannibal had rolled his eyes,

“Very good Will. Would you?”

“Sure, I can do the whole devoted partner thing.”

“Thank you for having to work so hard at it”

“I know, it's terrible. You're so awful. I can hardly bear it. Ugh. Lunch with your boss where I have to make nice. I can hardly think of anything worse. Oh, wait, I said I'd do the whole kiss arse thing. I'll make sure to borrow Abs’ Hello Kitty lip balm, it kind of shimmers. Ok. Maybe 1:30? Would that work for you?”

“Are you coming in, in the morning? We could drive together?”

“I love the idea, but I'll need to be able to get back for Abs. One sleepover or Molly collection a week is enough for now. Ok? You good to go cos I'm about to get Abigail up and you won't get out of the door for at least fifteen minutes if she sees you”

“Whereas you are content to chase me from my hearth and home”

“Read the letter later Hannibal. Have a nice day at the office dear.”

Hannibal gave Will a cool look,

“Oh yes, very good. I'll see you this evening. I might even cook if I'm ahead of you”

“Really? Fantastic. Oh god. The paperwork. Shame really, the moth is beautiful. Ok. ABS? Time to get up. Alright Hannibal thirty seconds”

“Later, Will”

He'd collected his briefcase and swallowed a last couple of gulps of coffee.

“Good coffee, thank you.”

……

>My dear Murasaki,

Try not to laugh too much but Simonetta is removing objects from around the house that Might just possibly cause Abigail nightmares. Of course we have no immediate plans for them to visit but as ever, Simonetta likes to be prepared!

With Hannibal in Washington they have taken the opportunity to share a house for the two months of the placement. Of course an excellent idea as it reveals all of ones habits and awkwardnesses. So much more visible than when one is on best behaviour for a short visit.

But also I cannot help but worry that when the two months are up they will find it all the harder to separate again. Hannibal is more used to the to and fro but even he will not be immune. I wonder, Murasaki, my dear, might I prevail on you or Robertus to offer some anticipatory wisdom? I suspect Hannibal might be more likely to notice such alerting from you rather than from me or his mother.

Abigail has sent us the most charming letters and pictures, and Will has managed to squeeze some time out from his own work and everything else he must be juggling to include a very warm note. I think he has managed to touch Simonetta’s heart in a very disingenuous and open way. It is rather touching.

Of this, I would like to ask, without betraying any confidence, if Mischa has been in touch at all? She is neatly deflecting enquiries from either her mother or me. I suspect something is afoot and that she would rather not say. Has she confided in you? If she has, my only concern is that she is alright. Perhaps there is a way you can reassure me of one without betrayal of the other?

So we have come to this at our end. I am spending my time worried, as ever, about my children. And now, about their partners. And in effect about a grandchild. Given Mischa’s definite stance on the matter and both Hannibal’s sexuality and occupation I had hardly thought it even possible. And now we find we constantly think of the sudden, unexpected and delightful expansion of the family.

And are endeavouring not to in any was apprise either Hannibal or Will about our vicarious happiness.

Such are we come to. I would have it no other way. And of course here I am asking nothing of how you fare? But I am content that you will tell me?

With all our love and affection……<

……..

>Darling, thank you for the answerphone message. Lunch would be lovely. Friday seems propitious if that would work for you? I've found those collar and studs of Andrew's, would you like them? Perhaps for the formal? I'm somewhat reluctant to ask but have you got over this silly business with Hannibal? I'm sure you know he's here briefly. Don't do anything stupid darling. For all I love the family, he's really not worth it. You've worked so hard! Anyway. Let's chase that away with a good lunch and a catch up. Mother<

Matthew Brown re-reads the text message from his mother and rolls his eyes, yes, he knows Hannibal is back. Of course he does. And this blasted formal too. Maybe lunch and a chance to vent is a good idea. Or at least it will provide an opportunity to get a grip on the situation again.

……

"Hey, Will, how's it going? Molly tells me we've got Abs tonight? Everything alright at home with the Colonel?"

"What? Oh, yeah, completely. She sort of asked. I think she's got this idea that Hannibal and I need to be on our own once a week. Something someone at school said about grown ups needing 'date night' or they get divorced."

"Wow! God. The things kids pick up. I mean, I kind of get the point, but wow. That's pretty full on. Ok. Lemme think about that for a second. Ok. Actually. Yeah. I can see how kids might get that message. Alright. So, daddy date night? Got any plans?"

"Unfortunately they mostly involve paperwork, that terrible microfiche reader in the library and the old card catalogue. Cassie, bless her heart has persuaded two interns in the other labs to come help us try and track for any more cases."

Bev wrinkles her nose,

"That's no fun at all. So, what, Hannibal is going to get home to cold and empty?"

"He is. The full on joy of a partner in law enforcement. Even if it is at the blunt end. Molly's ok with Abs isn't she?"

"She's fine. Are you fine? It's not the microfiche is it? Always gives me a migraine, the damn thing? The way it goes all swoopy and the focus changes so fast. Ugh. Blehhhh"

"No. Though I know what you mean. Good point I'll ask one of the interns to do that bit. Younger eyes and faster reactions and stuff."

"Are you saying we're old?"

“Mature. Like a cheese. Or vintage, like a wine, if you prefer!”

“I think I do. Marginally! I note how you neatly skated over how you are?”

“Me? Oh I'm ok, thanks. Headache. But you know, I'm slightly underslept, yeah, nice Bev, have you been practicing that wink in the mirror? It's good you know. Yeah. So. And moving, and whether Abs is basically going to have a fit at being moved twice, nope, three times in the space of a week. Yeah you can look all rueful. I'm just waiting for that one. Better warn Molly? Actually she might do better tonight somewhere she's absolutely secure.”

“Tell me about the headache Will? You've been eating painkillers for a week”

Will looks at her in surprise,

“Really? I hadn't noticed. Wow, I must be more overstretched than I knew. I'll ask Hannibal, he used to be a full on doctor. Maybe he'll suggest something. And before you do that wink again, yes I do know about all the wonderful range of painkillers and relaxants and euphoria inducing chemicals caused by sex. And I'm sure he does too. I'll make sure to ask him if that's a possible prescription.”

Bev laughs,

“Make sure you do! Try not to use all your daughter free evening on bugs”

……..

“Did you cook something? You did, didn't you? Have you been back long?”

Hannibal looks up from the tablet he is reading sitting at one of the islands in the kitchen, a small glass of wine to hand, and a notepad and pen close by. Will stands over him and grins and kisses him briefly. Hannibal keeps a hand on his arm.

“Come and sit down, do you want a glass of something? I've been back maybe a couple of hours. You look tired. Are you alright?”

Will hovers between sitting and just leaning against Hannibal. Leaning wins.

“Tired. Too many bugs. Too many random bugs. Three other moths though. We're now at eight confirmed, spread over five years. But escalating recently. Two in the last three months. It's awful. The only good or bad thing is that it's an import. Not an indigenous species, so someone somewhere is raising them. The guy I'll see on Friday has some database that tracks imports of rare species. Mainly for research purposes. He's a bit excited to help on this case. Though it's got to be said he didn't go all weird on me about it.”

“Friend of yours?”

“All us bug guys are friends. In as much as we have them. But yeah. Me and Eldon? We go back. He might even have introduced me to Margot? I'll have to ask him. Hey I could ask him to come on Sunday. To the ridiculous housewarming. You remember to tell Tobias and Miriam about food?”

“I did. Come and eat Will, here, sit here”

“Thanks. Sorry. It gets a bit like this when the case load piles up and we've got someone with historic shit and we've found them in a cycle. Worst of both worlds. Building the back case and backstory, hoping it helps with what's going on now, and processing stuff as it comes in to try and build a picture of current activity and future behaviour.”

“Eat some of this. Everything here seems under control and I even discovered the garbage gets collected tomorrow. That's under control too. Then I'm going to suggest maybe a bath and even an early night. Well. A relatively early night.”

“Thanks mom”

“Very good. I talked to Molly a while ago. She's talked to Abigail about date night. That seems to have been more or less sorted out in her mind. Molly wants to know if she should be leaning towards encouraging her to think it's alright for us to do things alone, and to make sure she knows we won't get divorced if date night doesn't happen every week.”

“I love that you just take this all mostly in your stride! This is good by the way thank you”

“You're welcome, its only cassoulet. I might make it again for the weekend, that and a clafoutis? Well, I'm getting used to the idea of date night, an eight year old worrying about her daddy, an eight year old’s worries in general, and her daddy’s worries too”

“I know. You're doing alright. We’ll mention you in dispatches.”

Hannibal laughs,

“Shower or bath Will? If you want a bath I'll go and run it now.”

“God. This is heaven. Bath I think. You too?”

“I thought you'd never ask”

“Date night? It feels like I had a date with the East Coast Killer”

“Indeed.....I did read your letter Will"

Will looks up from the cassoulet and smiles,

"Oh yeaH? Perfect, that's much better"

.....

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about no weekend update - someone in the household forgot to say it was my inlaws wedding anniversary and we were going to a. Stay with them for the weekend and b. Go out for dinner on the Saturday and c. Go out for a family lunch on the Sunday.

Oh and my father in law has a new book coming out and we spent three hours between us arguing about the cover and the inside frontispiece and shit. And my mother in law is giving a

paper at a conference next week and wanted to talk about that.

And I had a little bit of knitting to do.

Oh yeah, did I mention we're moving this week? Yeah. We're moving this week! Finally. Wednesday might be a bit weird...

Thank you for rocking by today xxxx.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 47

Chapter Notes

Some NSFW at the start...

“I will admit that the bath was one of the things that sold me about the house”

“Oh? Oh, the double ends?”

“Of course. Are you comfortable?”

“Thank you. Yes. Perfect”

“The trick with the towel is good. Less stressful on the knees”

“Picked it up from an ante-natal class, all about bathing infants and then toddlers. Works for adults too”

“I'm reasonably sure I'm too tired to come”

“Me too. This is nice though. I'll move in a bit”

“If you move, I think I'll just slip out of you”

“That's why I'm not moving. And why there's a towel. It'd kill my knees against the tub. Is it porcelain do you think?”

“Enamelled I think. Sure you're comfortable? Would you like me to pass you a glass? And I never thought I'd really see the point of a plastic wine glass but I may have been convinced.”

“Less terrifying if it gets dropped. Thank you. Yes. No Abigail, equals at least one full glass of something. If it's not a killer day the next day”

“Forgive me, isn't it always a killer day?”

“You're apologising in front of your puns? It's like you hardly know me! Did I tell you about the Beatles thing I did to Jimmy?”

“I think you did. But it was good. Tell me again”

“God, I love you so much. Can I kiss you first and then tell you again?”

Will sits up a little, back on his heels, and holds the plastic glass of wine to one side and kisses Hannibal again. Hannibal manages to take the glass without either of them dropping it. Really! A white carpet in a bathroom! They must put down some kind of matting. Or maybe stick to white wine in the bath. How decadent.

“Hmm. That's good. I like the bath smell. What is it?”

“Rose de Maroc. Moroccan rose. Sorry. I know you know”

“It's ok. Tiredness is allowed. I didn't know we had any bath stuff. It smells like Turkish Delight.”

“It's not bath stuff it's culinary oil. It was one of the other oils I made. Along with the chilli and rosemary. I thought it would smell good. And you won't taste of soap either”

“That doesn't sound like so much fun. Oh. Wait. This is the letter! Didn't I say shower?”

“I think the bath might work as well, especially with the added towels. Are you too tired?”

“I'm rapidly getting a second wind. Really? What lean over the edge? Arms along the top? Do I kneel?”

They manoeuvre themselves round the bath. Will kneels against one end and leans over the edge with his arms relaxed and crossed just resting there. He looks back.

“Ok. Are my knees far enough apart? Hannibal? What is it? Are you alright?”

Hannibal is kneeling a little behind Will in the bath, one hand on one edge of the bath the other rubbing a little over his face,

“I was enjoying how very satisfying it is to be with someone who both wants and loves you. In equal measure. And who is able and willing to show it and say so”

Will twists towards him, and reaches back a hand to touch his face gently,

“I do love you. It's like I said, the experience of being wanted, of being touched by someone who wants to touch me? It's outstanding. Amazing. I love it. I love you. Everything about you. I'm amazed at his compatible we are. Even with the whole jangly stuff. You're even kind about that”

“There is no way in which I would want you to be stressed by my touch.

“I know. Amazing. Hannibal? My love? Shall we stop for now? Just go to bed? We can do this another day. You look whacked and though I'm totally on board I'm also knackered and could probably go to sleep just like that!”

“Sure?”

“There will be many other days and nights when you get to eat me out like I am Turkish delight.”

“That's a sweet promise Will”

“I love that you're so oral”

“And that you're so anal”

“I know. Compatible right?”

“Bed then? Maybe some kissing?”

“And fingering?”

“And sucking?”

“All of that. Race to see which one falls alseep first and then feels guilty tomorrow?”

“Sound perfect. What happens to the towels?”

“We drain the tub, let them drip dry”

“They'll smell of roses”

“Fantastic. Each time I smell them I'll get half hard thinking about you rimming me and then me sucking you off. Or vice versa. Rose oil rather than rosemary?”

“As long as it's not the chilli.”

Will rolls his eyes,

“I would never have used the chilli”

“I'm still going to mark the bottles better”

……..

>hey girl! This lunch on Sunday. At the Colonel’s? Did I say we have to bring something? Potluck? You got any ideas? The Colonel’s from Lithuania, do they even have a cooking style? Dr Graham is from Louisiana. And the Colonel’s folks live in France now. So maybe something Frenchish? How hard is that? Shall I get some things? We could cook on Saturday? Would that be fun? Love you girl, Tobe<

>Tobe, French! Damn. I can do French toast and French fries. Do they count? Shit! I have no idea. Ok. I'll think about it. I can do cous-cous. Is that French? It kind of sounds French? We could so some grilled veggies and chicken to go with it? How about that? XxxFrankie<

>Awesome job. The boss says there might be as many as 25 people. You got a big enough pan? I might be able to borrow something from the mess?<

>I got a canning pan. Wow. 25! I thought it was just a lunch!<

>yeah well. Boss and DrG, Miriam, you and me, three kids, five colleagues plus partners, some kids from DrG’s lab, maybe the General and his wife! DrG’s brother in law plus people from his church!!! I dunno. Oh some guy from the Smithsonian. Bug guy, like DrG. I think it’s more of a housewarming now<

>damn. Ok. Big pot of couscous, tagine? I think that's it. Ok. Let's cook Saturday. That sounds kinda nice babe. The General? We all gonna kiss some arse? It's all good. See you tonight? Or tomorrow?xxx Frankie<

……

Hannibal reads Mischa's letter for the third time. He glances up out of the office window. Grey sky. But not raining right now. It must have stopped. It was raining thirty minutes ago. Quite hard. He wonders if it is in Brussels. It often seems to be. There's a knock on his door.

“Colonel Lecter? I've someone to see you. He says it'll be quick.”

“Of course. Thank you Sargeant. Has the General sent word?”

“Pushed back to this afternoon. But still on for lunch on Friday. I know this because he's bumped some guy whose guy called me to moan. All sorted Sir and I've booked a table too”

“Thank you. Show my guest in please. Oh.”

“Hannibal do try not to look like a landed trout! How are you? I'm only here for a minute or two. Bedelia said you were in town. Though actually the invite gave me the heads up”

“Anthony. Well. It's certainly a surprise. I didn't know you were here”

“Didn't you? Oh. The invite was a universal? Damn. I rather hoped you might have changed your mind! Well. Bother.”

“Have a seat Anthony. I'm sorry. It must have been sent out without me knowing, though actually we'd have asked you anyway, but I might have stuck a note in to warn you. I'm assuming you’re here on some embassy posting?”

“I am. And Bedders has got some University gig. College I suppose you'd say here.”

“How is Bedelia?”

“She fines thanks. Look, I'm sorry to have read it wrong. Now and back then. No hard feelings?”

He smirks a little, Hannibal sighs,

“No feelings at all, except possibly amusement?”

“Jolly good. Leave em laughing. That's my motto. Though I think you left me. No, no, don't frown. There wasn't exactly leaving to do. It was a very enjoyable week. Well. Not even a week.”

“Not so much for Mischa. Or I'd say for Bedelia”

“Ah yes. Sorry about Mischa. Is she alright?”

“I think so. Still busy”

“And you? Here for what eight weeks? Nine?”

“I am. And I've met someone.”

“Well damn Hannibal. That's smashing. Decent bloke I hope?”

“FBI. Entomologist. Single father”

“Wow. You really meant it about being a homebody and a settler! That's marvellous. And the FBI, how very grown up of him!”

Hannibal smiles, maybe this is right, Will is very adult about everything, albeit with humour and felicity, and such sweetness. And of course has had to be.

“Perhaps that so. And yes. The domesticity suits and thrills me”

“Lovely. Super. I couldn't be happier for you. Now. What I want is some nice warm and wiling body with whom to play. You don't know anyone spare do you? Your sort of age, bit younger or older, I like the whole uniform thing, hmm. Out and happy about it? Pretty?”

Drily Hannibal asks,

“And what about Bedelia?”

“Didn't I say? She's got some thing going. Won't say with whom. Back in Paris I think. Keeping it hush hush. She'll come to the dance thing. You could ask her. I said I'd pop by and say hello. Alright? No hard feelings Hannibal?”

“It's fine. I think I'll warn Will you'll be at the dinner. He might give you the once over.”

“You make me feel quite rakish and thrilling myself. And I promise not to flirt or be annoying. I'm afraid I've heard about Matthew Brown.”

“You and the rest. But I appreciate the gesture. Thank you”

“Not at all. Make sure you tell your chap. I only play with willing partners. I don't want some big FBI guy giving me a hard look, and a harder hook!”

Hannibal smiles at this image of Will. The hook and the look might not be too far off though.

“I'll make sure he knows. And yes. The thing with Matthew is an ongoing trial”

“Hannibal? You've got that funny thinking look on your face. Oh. Wait. He's not single, out and proud, pretty and the right age is he? He is! Isn't he! Damn! You have to introduce me! Really! You must! Oh yes! And a uniform? What is he? Colonel?”

Faintly Hannibal says,

“Yes. Colonel. I'm afraid he got put back from General. He might not make it back”

“As far as I re-call Colonel’s evening dress is damn fine. Those tails! Woof woof Hannibal. Tell me you'll set me up?”

“Anthony, he's being especially difficult. I'm not sure I'd want to do it to you”

“Is he a bit rough? I do like rough. Oh, I know, you're all sweetness and light. But, please! I beg you”

“I won't promise. This is a little too odd Anthony. Even for you”

“Why? Cos we slept together? Don't be a princess. I'm a grown up too, really, introduce me and then I'll see what I can manage. And wouldn't it sort that particular problem?”

Hannibal nods slowly. It would, maybe. But really?

“I shall speak with Will. Alright. I think, well, thank you for coming by Anthony. I'll see you at the formal? And I will have thought about it quite hard. Matthew might be there.”

“Good oh. Where's my brolly? Well not mine actually. It was raining cats and dogs earlier. Bedders will kill me if I lose it, it's her’s”

Hannibal hands him the umbrella and then looks at it a little harder. It's very like one he gave to Mischa a couple of years back. Very like. He unbuttons the clasp. Checks the label. It's embroidered with an ‘M’. He looks at Anthony,

“Anthony, how did Bedelia get this umbrella?”

……..

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 48

Hannibal pours Will the sole cup of coffee he allows himself on a Saturday morning, Will accepts it and smiles, looks quizzically at Hannibal who definitely has something on his mind,

“Did I tell you I saw Iris Brown at the restaurant before you arrived?”

“Matthew Brown’s mother? Was she eating lunch there?”

“She was supposed to be meeting Matthew. He'd got caught up in something and called her to cancel.”

“I'm going to call that a narrow escape I think. Or would the General have pulled rank?”

Will grins a little into his cup, Hannibal makes good coffee,

“He'd have pulled something. Maybe a fit if Matthew had started off”

“Well, all to the good then. Are they really coming on Sunday?”

“Apparently so. The Judge is keen on it. Well she's keen on the General making it up one more rung I think. And we'd help with that.”

“I wonder if she's any appropriate contacts in the Underworld”

“Will, that's awful”

“Crossed your mind though? Maybe?”

“I'm not especially proud of the fact!”

“I know lots of guys. But they're all inside.”

Will sighs. Some of the guys he knows he wouldn't wish on anyone, even Matthew Fucking Brown. Hannibal pauses,

“Actually. I have just an outline of an idea but I'd like you to hear it through before you tell me what you think? How would that be?”

“Ok. This is gonna have multiple parts and I'm not going to like some of them? That kind of idea?”

“Possibly. The first bit is the bit you'll like least I think. Well, that and the second and third bits.”

Will eyes him,

“Go on. And can I just say you've about thirty minutes before Abigail decides she's had enough of what ever terrible thing she is currently doing with hello kitty and the tentacle thing!”

“I'll try and be succinct so we've got lots of time to disagree about it”

“Go on then. I've got a whole heap of sighs and eye rolls ready for you”

“Anthony Dimmond came by earlier in the week”

“What the HeLL! Hannibal, why didn't you.. ok. You're right, I hate the first thing, go on”

“He and Bedelia are here in Washington on a two year roll over. Bedelia is at Georgetown. Anthony at the Embassy, that's not the bad bit of part two. Ready?”

Will nods,

“It wasn't Anthony having the affair with Mischa. It was Bedelia. Mischa basically lied”

“Oh. Right. That's not great. And the third bit?”

“It didn't stop at that New Year. It's been off and on ever since.”

“Oh fuck. Oh god. And you're going to kill her? Wait no, you're not. You're going to ask her in a loving and oh so compassionate way which will basically make her feel way worse about it? Something like that?”

“It had crossed my mind. But can we park this for a moment? Back to Anthony?”

“Sure. You've got more skin in this game. What else?”

“Anthony did a lot of apologising, and made it very clear it had only ever been a bit of fun for him and wanted to make nice. No drama there. And he and Bedelia are coming to the formal. He wanted you to be clear he wouldn't be sniffing round. I think I might have frightened him with the whole FBI thing.”

Will snorts a little,

“Ok. I won't thump him straight off then. And? What's the big deal?”

“He's heard about Matthew too. And an idea emerged”

“I'm not seeing it”

“Anthony is basically on the look out for someone who wants something with limited ties, lots of sex, who is confident about being out, an appropriate age and who wears a uniform.”

“And you both thought Matthew? You're mad. He's close to being a pscychopath. He's obsessed. How could that possibly work?”

“As I say it's an idea. Matthew thinks he knows what he wants. I suspect some of it at least is suddenly finding he can't have what he didn't want. I'd be a lot less interesting if I was single again.”

Will looks at him coolly, damn, this got onto really painful territory fast,

“I'm not interested in playing him just to get him off our backs. Not my style Hannibal. Sorry. Maybe we've got different ideas about what's…”

“Will, I'm so sorry, I think I've miss-explained. What I mean is that Anthony thinks he can make a play for Matthew and I'm not inclined to get in the way. I don't have any intention of changing

either what or how we are. Nor do I see it as a game. Though both Matthew and Anthony seem to."

"So they've that in common already?"

"Anthony is essentially quite narcissistic, Matthew might suit him very well"

"Hannibal. I'm going to put it another way. I don't want anything to do with Matthew Brown. He threatened me and he frightened Abi. I realise he is part of your wider world and that you may have to interact with him. Count me out"

"He may come to the formal"

"Perhaps I shouldn't then"

Hannibal looks at him, perhaps a little non-plussed,

"I should have allowed for longer than thirty minutes for us to disagree on this. I'm sorry. He's been asked as part of his job. It would have been highly inappropriate to kick him off the list, though I believe Sargeant Budge and Private Lass may have tried a little subtle ruse."

Will looks at him. Not saying anything. He does break first though,

"What did they do? Are they in trouble?"

"No. I think they encouraged one of Matthew's staff to semi-lose the invitation at his end"

"Ok. Not great either. I hate this kind of thing. I had so much shit with Margot. I know it's not all a bed of roses, no relationship is. But I hate games and manipulation. I thought it wasn't your bag either"

He looks down at his lap. And takes a deep breath,

"I get it. I really do. And it could be a happy outcome for both of them. Great. But am I wrong about you?"

"Will, strategy is part of my work. I'm applying some strategic thinking here. I can see that it's easy to see as manipulative, or game playing. I'm sorry. Maybe I am, maybe I do."

Will looks down again, he remembers that Matthew Brown had called Hannibal manipulative. But then so is he, Will looks up at Hannibal again and thinks of the various ways in which they have both been at different points in the relationship to date.

"Maybe we both are. I probably used the letter from Molson as leverage. I'm not quite sure to what end but at some level. Probably."

He puts his cup down and rests his chin on his hand, Hannibal watches him carefully, some kind of re-balancing going on,

"Will?"

"I am a bit of a shit. I say I want Matthew out of our lives in any way possible and then I baulk at what would actually be a relatively mild bit of matchmaking. Sorry. I'm just carrying round too much rubbish. And of course I'll come."

“Will, you make entirely valid points. We’ll stay completely out of it. I utterly accept your concerns. I'm sorry. I should have been more thoughtful in both how I approached it and how I discussed it. I am still leaning that in certain respects there are either two or three of us to include in any putative plans.”

“Thank you. I do too. I'm used to two. And used to a pretty terrible historic three. I haven't quite got a handle on a better three”

“Both still learning then?”

“Yeah. And climbing the mountain.”

“At least together?”

“Yeah. Together. I'm not letting either Matthew or Anthony Dimmond fuck things up by default!”

“That would be particularly bad”

“It would. Now. Two things, for one I can hear the dawn of Saturday morning Abigail. And two, Mischa? What are we going to do really”

“We?”

“Yeah. Nice try though. We.”

“Thank you Will”

Will nods,

“I'm gonna have a second cup of coffee. I think I deserve it. Abs? Breakfast. God what is that? Show Hannibal instead.”

“Hannibal! Tentacles is going to marry a bientot kitty, can you help me make them dresses and things to wear?”

Hannibal looks at Will in mild concern, Will grins back, and gets on with pouring some more coffee.

“So, tentacles. And what would tentacles like to wear to a wedding.”

Abi smiles broadly,

“I think a proper trouser suit? With lots of legs?”

“Of course. When we go out to buy food for tomorrow shall we go by a craft store and buy some necessities. Perhaps we might draw some designs later, I'm sure there will be people willing to help tomorrow too.”

Will watches Abigail and Hannibal discuss what tentacles and a bientot kitty might like to wear and whether any of the other toys might want to dress up too. God. Matthew Brown. And really? It's a terrible idea. Isn't it?

…….

Freddie Lounds puts the tape recorder on the table between them,

“Ok Dr Stammetts, let’s just try a little something for the sound ok?”

Eldon Stanmetts leans towards the small machine,

“One two buckle my shoe, three four, knock at the door. How's that?”

She plays it back.

“Perfect. Thank you. So. Jack Crawford told you I'd be by?”

“He did. Background on the moths as I understand?”

She looks around the large room. Wooden shelves on three sides, long glass windows out over a gallery on the third. In the corner there is a large bite out of the room which is occupied by what looks like a huge wooden box. Covered in felt or something. Excluding the light. The shelves are populated by specimens, books, PhD theses, bits of redundant equipment and paper work. Surprisingly un-dusty though.

“That's it. Everything you've got. And any pictures we can take. How are they with light?”

“How are you with lots and lots of detail?”

“Detail? Detail I like, easier to edit down than make it up. Especially with the science schtick. You talk, I'll ask questions if it looks like you're running out of material.”

“Ms Lounds, There is almost zero chance I will run out of things to say about these moths. Or moths in general. Or the use of insects in forensics? You've met Will Graham haven't you?”

She nods.

“Sure, Dr G? I have. Why?”

“He can insect for the US. Me? I could insect for the Earth!”

Freddie grins, really? Bug guys! Really, they're quite fun guys! Hilarious.

“Have at it, Dr Stammetts. Ready? Steady? Go!”

So he does……

……

Will knocks back a couple of painkillers, and carries on chopping onions, a few tears leaking from the corner of his eyes,

“Wow, crying full on now. Did I say, I looked up about the opera? They've got a children's matinee! How perfect is that? They've cut some of the longer bits. We could see that with Abigail and see the full version ourselves a different night. How would that be?”

Hannibal smiles in delight. How very like Will to have worked out what would work for he and Abigail and make it the most natural thing in the world to do both. He carries on peeling the plums he has just retrieved from boiling water, to loosen the skins, for a clafoutis,

“I think that sounds Iike something I'd enjoy very much. You too Will?”

“Abigail has the best chance of enjoying a shorter version, I'd like to do the full Opera thing with you. Win both ways.”

“Shall I book the tickets then? The formal is the 23rd. I'll make sure we avoid that weekend”

“Great. I didn't check the run. The only dates we can't do are Spring Break. We have to see all the parents and in laws then. Margot's mom Marissa said Molson has been by to Mason’s church a couple of times. She called me at work when he was out”

“You didn't say?”

“Oh, I must have forgotten. My head’s been bothering me a bit. All the tiny slides and the terrible microfiche. Must have just gone clean through it!”

“And Mason is coming tomorrow? I might ask him about it then?”

“Sounds like a plan. Is this enough onion? Please say it is? I'm all out of tears”

He smiles to himself, would that that were so.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 49

"Hmmm, that's nice, do that some more. Brian said he thought you were more handsy when there were other people around”

Hannibal stands a little behind Will in their kitchen, gently kissing the side of Will’s neck, one hand on his waist.

“Did he? After that terrible January barbecue where they couldn't get it to light? Maybe. Keeping an eye on my territory? It's what a good soldier does”

“Yeah and the rest, Colonel Lecter. Territoriality, ownership, property? It wasn't a complaint Hannibal. I like it. I told you”

“Fortunate then. What was it that Matthew said to you, ‘manipulative, obsessive, possessive’? Guilty as charged, where you're concerned. I think we've established that. What are you doing?”

“Apart from not paying you enough attention? Yeah, I see you. Garlic bread. How do people eat so much of this stuff. This must be the fifth loaf”

“Organised of you then. What, one for every five people?”

“One, two, lots. You gonna let me get this next door?”

“I'm reluctant to move.”

“Yeah. And I'm gonna fight so hard to get away. If you let up a bit I could turn round and kiss you back”

“And you won't try to escape?”

“Nah, they can wait a few minutes more.”

Hannibal shifts to let Will turn. Will slides both his arms round Hannibal's neck and kisses him.

“Good kisses?”

“Great. Shut up”

“Make me”

There's more kissing until they're interrupted by a small cough.

“Daddy. Can you stop kissing for a minute and give me the garlic bread? This is the third time I've come to get it and if I got back without it Bev says she's coming to take pictures for the notice board at work. What does that mean?”

The two men break apart and laugh,

“Abigail Graham tell Dr Katz here is her garlic bread, and if any pictures appear on any notice boards the whole New York incident is going to do the rounds. Don’t think I wouldn't.”

“Ok. You can do more kissing now. Lily says grown ups don't get enough time to kiss. Although that might be what her mommy says”

“I think Lily’s mommy is quite sensible”

Abigail takes the bread and disappears off to the living area where the big table is covered in a ridiculous potluck of food which is never the less steadily being demolished by the assembled group. She's clearly greeted by cheers. And one or two whistles. Will smirks at Hannibal,

“You know. Something I never did was spend the whole weekend in bed with someone. Well, I guess, that's obvious, if I think about it. But I'd like that. Just get up for food. Or tea, or a lazy bath. But lots of bed and sex and just lazing around. Can we swing that before you go back do you think?”

Hannibal smiles back at him and kisses him again,

“I could send everyone home right now!”

“Yeah. Cheapskate, that'd only be a Sunday afternoon. I want the full works! Maybe even a hotel?”

“You make it sound very tempting.”

“Yeah? We could combine it with the daddy opera trip.”

“We could. Though would you want to get out of bed to go to the opera?”

“Don't know until I've tried. You might need a break.”

Hannibal opens and closes his mouth,

“You're a terrible man”

“Have you sorted out the dates for New York?”

“Avoiding Spring Break and the formal. I have. Well, that's not true, Miriam has. Shall I ask her to add a night before and a night after?”

“Friday through Monday?”

“I'd enjoy it very much. Shall we?”

“I think you might be able to tell just how excited I am simply thinking about it”

Will presses just a little harder against Hannibal. They smile complicity at each other.

“The apron covers a multitude of sins”

Will huffs a small laugh,

“Yeah, good job eh? I'm going to brave the braying throng, you coming?”

“In a moment”

Will grins at him and a few moments later Hannibal hears his arrival in the living room greeted by small cheers. He smiles to himself. A whole weekend? Will all to himself? And vice versa? Wonderful.

…….

Brian grins at Hannibal, and hands him yet another plate to dry,

“The overall consensus is that we're willing to keep you.”

Hannibal quirks an eyebrow at him,

“Oh yes?”

“Yeah. We've talked about it. Without Will as it happens, though none of us would have baulked at including him, he was just having a bit of a lie down. The bugs were getting to him, maybe, I'll come back to that.”

“Go on..”

“Ok. So, number one, Abigail likes you. Sure she adores you, but she actually likes you too. Big win. The trouser thing for Tentacles? You're not just being nice for Will’s sake. You like her too. Ok. Number two, Will likes you. Yeah you can smile. I mean properly. He likes me and Jims, Jack too, Eldon, and Garrett in the other lab. He's got a lot of friends, people who like him right back. But you've managed something no one else has done, not even Bev. And we can all see him just being happy. It's fantastic. We all love him. But even when Margot was alive he was sometimes just a shadow. Trying not to be in the way. It's great. Truly. And I get the feeling that works both ways?”

Hannibal nods at him,

“It does. I think we both know ourselves better when we're with each other. Of course it's not smooth sailing all the way.”

Brian interrupts,

“Well shit! Of course not. He's got a whole luggage compartment of baggage, and I'd guess you've got some too? Apart from Mr Colonel? But, you look like you're both trying. Even Molly is impressed, and for all that she looks like a big ball of fluff she takes no prisoners! Really. I sometimes wish we could swop her out for Bev in the team. Bev’s great but she's a softy. Truly.”

“Extraordinary. She's mastered the camouflage then”

Brian grins at him,

“Good isn't she? Yeah. Radical softy. Where was I? Ok, yeah. Something occurred to me the other day. You know Will’s having headaches? It might be his eyes? He should have had an eye check about six months ago. And all the close work might not be helping. But he's eaten his own body weight in aspirin the last few weeks. There's something not right”

“He mentioned something about it. But only in passing? How long would you say?”

“Off and on? Maybe four weeks? A few weeks before you came back. Oh, actually the first time I noticed was when he came back from Paris. I thought it was jet lag. He did too, I think. You used to

be a doctor right?"

"I did. I'll ask him about it. Is he bad at health things overall?"

"Not bad exactly. It's just there's always someone else who comes first. Abigail obviously, Margot when she was alive, his dad, even Margot's parents, Mason too. And now you. Probably joint first with Abigail, or maybe just a little behind. You get it?"

"I do. She has to be the priority."

Brian smiles at him again,

"Good job, Colonel Doctor everything else. Oh and number three, just in general? We do all like you. And that plum thing was amazing. Jim wants to know if you can cook in general?"

……..

Bedelia sits back on the sofa and accepts a small cup of coffee from Anthony. He sits beside her on the sofa and turns to face her just a little. He nudges her with his knee,

"Beds, I'm really sorry. I honestly didn't mean to out you like that. I assumed, wrongly as it turns out, that Mischa would have told him. And it really was an accident. The whole umbrella thing was what twigged him"

Bedelia takes one or two mouthfuls of coffee. He tries again,

"Really. What can I do to make it up to you? It was pouring with rain. And at least I didn't lose it"

"Anthony it's not about the umbrella and you know it."

"Just going for a little distracting levity darling. Are you going to tell Mischa?"

"I suppose I am. I can't really hope to do so before Hannibal contacts her, but I should"

"Can't you text her?"

"I think she would hate that. Even more than a call. It will have to be a letter."

"I really am sorry."

"Oh Anthony. Don't worry. I'll find a way to make you pay. Now. Any more nasty surprises from the conversation with Hannibal? Did you at least manage to get over any lingering annoyances he might have with you?"

"I think so. Pretty much. Oh! And he's met someone here! Some soldier programme, little girl's widowed father. Works for the FBI of all things! He's remarkably chipper about it. Honestly, his face lit up like bonfire night when he talked about the chap. Sweet really."

"What you mean is that it sounds terrible. All that domestic bliss and comfort?"

"I know. You know me so well. Grim as hell. But honestly he looked like the Cheshire Cat."

"Perhaps he'll be a little less cross with Mischa then?"

“He might be a jolly sight more tender with her. What do you think, will that be worse or better? Yes darling. It will won't it. Hannibal being all sweet and understanding and awfully hurt? Ugh. You better write soon.”

Bedelia finishes her coffee, and puts the empty cup on the tray on the low ottoman in front of them.

“Yes. I better had. Order something in for supper Anthony. I don't think I can face cooking.”

He leans towards her and pats her face gently,

“It'll be all right old girl. Chin up. French do you? Keeping with the overall theme?”

“Very good Anthony. And yes. Thank you. Maybe for about 8pm?”

He smiles. That could have gone way worse. Oh. Well. Maybe this isn't the best moment to mention Matthew Brown.

……..

Judge Davies the General’s wife bounces Tentacles and a bientot kitty on her knee. This is a surprising amount of fun. The little girl is a darling. The father is attractive and also very sweet, and the Colonel is doing the best impression of a contented uxurious pater familias that she's seen in a long while. And she's pretty sure it's not a put on show. She's caught the happy glances, fond touches, unspoken communication, and she's seen a lot of faking it in court. This looks like the real deal. And as for Abigail? There’s clear adoration on the part of the little girl.

Reba, seated beside her on a low sofa which will be hell to get out of, leans against her a little.

“What you thinking Judge. I can hear your brain working over”

“Ms McClane…”

“Call me Reba.”

“Sweet of you. Reba then, I was just reflecting on the happiness quotient. My husband has a notion to support the Colonel in making a transfer back. But you know, at this level, you have to know the man a little. Outside of the Officer’s mess and the job they do?”

“You're testing the water then?”

“I'd say that was so. What do you think?”

“My first time meeting them. I know Will’s brother in law. He's started coming to our church. Wanted me to meet Will and Abigail, and Hannibal as part of the deal. They're important to Mason.”

“Wills brother in law? I know he was married. But no one is saying. Is there some nasty backstory”

Reba leans in towards her,

“The worst. His wife was killed. Just possibly an accident, but sadly, and more likely she was murdered. Three years ago. Terrible thing. Mason is just coming through the worst of it. His father and mother? Still stuck badly. We're trying to be present for them.”

“And Will?”

“Wills got amazing friends, but he's been alone the last three years and that must have taken its toll, what with a little girl an all, even if Abigail is a sweetheart. That's got to have involved a lot of effort on his part.”

Judge Davies looks to where she can see Will laughing with Beverly Katz, one of his colleagues at the FBI apparently, and Abigail, and a small girl whom she thinks might be Beverly's niece.

“It must. She's given me a French Hello Kitty Doll and an awful thing with Tentacles to hold. I think I might be especially honoured. Apparently they're getting married and Hannibal is making the octopus a trouser suit”

Reba laughs,

“I think that's devotion then! Here, let me have Tentacles. Oh yes. Very nice. Velvet is it? Eleven legs though. What’s that then? A squid?”

“I think it might just be a ‘thing’. And probably her favourite thing. Do you know colours? The thing is purple and pink”

“I do. I had use of my eyes as a child. Measles did it for me. Purple and pink? Oh my! Sounds adorable. It's very squishy. I like it”

Abigail sidles over to her,

“Hello. Do you like Tentacles? I think Tentacles is the best thing. Jimmy gave me him for my birthday two and a bit years ago. I can ask him to get you one if you'd like?”

“That's very kind. Maybe I'm a bit big for Tentacles?”

“That's what grown ups always say. Where there's something they really want but they think they shouldn't.”

Reba nods at her,

“You're right. Maybe you could ask Jimmy to let me know where Tentacles grew up and I can find out if there are any family members in need of a home? What do you think?”

“I think yes. Can you come with me now. We can ask. So we don't forget. Grown ups do that too, when they think they shouldn't have something. They say they'll do it later. When really they don't mean it at all. They're too shy to say they do want it. So they pretend. Do you want one?”

“I think I do. Introduce me to Jimmy. Is he the one with the funny little huffy laugh?”

Abigail smiles delightedly,

“He is! And he always jumps when people say something loud. He sort of squeaks invisibly!”

The Judge watches Abigail guide Reba over to a couple of men standing beside the dining table. Almost empty now, except for a fresh round of tea and coffee. Pragmatically this little extended family could do a lot of good for the General and the ‘Adapt, evolve, become’ integration and diversity policy in the army more widely. But for the family and their friends? Well, it's a rather

fine thing in its own right. She glances round to see her husband watching her and she nods at him. He nods back briefly. He's got it too.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 50

Chapter Notes

And less than three seconds of nsfw...

.....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I talked to the General Will. How do you feel about being the whole poster boy thing?”

“Poster boy Fred? Oh yeah, poster boy. Less bothered than I was a month ago to be honest. We talked to the General on Friday, well, actually he and Hannibal did most of the talking and I objected every now and again.”

“What were you objecting to?”

“Mainly them emphasising the whole FBI thing. I had to remind them I'm a back room bug guy. I know I'm great at what I do. But I also know I am a content small cog in a well oiled machine. Hang on Fred, I can't see Buster again. He's already tried to eat the leftover casserole and whatever amazing thing it was that Sargeant Budge’s girlfriend made for dessert. I'll be back in a tick”

Will scoots off with hisses of “Buster” and “Winston” at the kind of threat level that would terrify most dogs into instant submission. Fred grins and wonders if really he ought to think about making a move. Bev and Molly have gone with Lily and Wally, and the crowd has thinned to just Jimmy and Brian, one of Hannibal’s staff Private Lass, and a mildly intimidating looming fellow called Dragon who is having a full on conversation with Abigail that involves Tentacles, several Kitties, and some other toys.

The General and his wife have gone as have Sargeant Budge and Frankie. Mason took the Pastor and to be sure Fred could see that the whole church thing might just be the restoring of Mason Verger. And maybe even his father. Which would be an extraordinary thing. He'd been very impressed by her. And the whole cake thing. Not his bag at all but he could see how it might appeal. And be very real too. He smiles as Hannibal joins him,

“I'm still surprised we know no one in common. We even overlapped for a year?”

“I know. I suppose we were both on the fringe of groups that only just met in the middle?”

“And I was certainly very into the surgical side by the time you were starting on the therapeutic. Oh well. Someone will turn up and we'll both say things like ‘oh of course!’”

Frederick smiles,

“It's been a good afternoon. Abigail looks very happy.”

“She's doing well. But I've had a friendly reminder from my aunt that it will hit her hard when I have to go back”

“She’ll need plenty of reassurance. I'd go as far as to say Will too”

“Speaking as his friend?”

“For sure. If I was just the staff trick cyclist I'd be saying nothing right now. Actually I probably wouldn't be here. No this is all a friend thing. I'm fond of Will. But you know that. He is a magnet for those of us who are a little bit on the edges of things”

Hannibal smiles, so he's not the only one who's noticed it. Makes sense it would be Frederick, therapist or not in this context.

“My Private says I collect strays. That's not so different.”

“It isn't. I think you're rather similar in lots of respects.”

Hannibal nods,

“Jimmy said ‘identically different’”

Fredrick laughs,

“That's nice! Oh, I like that. Will tell you I offered a chance to talk if it'd be helpful?”

“He did. I'm still thinking about it. I think it might be helpful. Especially the closer we get to my going. I will have to, not even the General can work the kind of miracle that would resolve everything in time. But he's hopeful it'll be six months or less.”

Fred nods,

“Still a long time. For all of you?”

“It is. I've arranged to talk to one of our chaplains back at the base when I'm back. I'm not religious but he's sensible and doubles as the go to guy to talk to. And is reasonably positive about gays in the military.”

“You've had stick? Not just about this Colonel guy? Before?”

Hannibal smiles,

“Don't ask, don't tell. For years. As I live and breathe. I'm hoping we don't see any backsliding by the new administration”

“You up for fronting it?”

“A positive integration campaign? I'm not a limelight seeker but it could do several things at once.”

Frederick nods. He gets it, there will be compromises, by Hannibal and probably Will too. Hannibal carries on,

“But if Will decides no, or Agent Crawford thinks it's too risky, or it looks like it'd hurt Abigail, we’ll just have to go the slow way round”

“Worth the wait though?”

Will re-joins them and hands Hannibal and Fred cups of coffee,

“Fred, you gotta have some coffee if you're going to stay awake on the drive, or we've got room. Dragon apparently is kipping down in his van, he'll be in for breakfast. Man he is damn good on Hello Kitty duty. Abigail told him he was handsome and I thought he might cry. I think she's got a dragon crush. Private Lass is about to go Hannibal, do you want to say goodbye? What are we waiting for Fred?”

“Only good things Will. Only good. Thanks for the coffee. I'll drink it and make the run. I'm not sure I can face hello kitty over breakfast. Though I'm grateful for the offer. Another time. I heard Brian saying your shower was to die for”

“Really? How does he know? Weird.”

……

“Lift your leg a little. If you put it over my hip I can reach from here.”

“Like this? Oh. God. That's..”

“My love…”

……

“Dragon says thank you for the pancakes. He won't come in but could he have another cup of coffee please?”

“Sure. Is he ok. He wasn't cold last night? It's just a panel van”

“He's got a big bit of foam and a sleeping bag and lots of blankets. We could have lent him Buster and Winston, but Dragon says they make him sneeze a bit. I think he was alright. He seems happy now. Daddy?”

“Abs. Ask me when you come back, take him it while it's hot, cream and sugar?”

“Just one. Ok”

She's gone but back quickly,

“Daddy, why does he hide his face. He's got a nice face. But he says people stare sometimes.”

Will looks at her, oh the complexities of people and their varying unkindnesses.

“Some peole are just like that. You know your grandpa just cusses?”

“He's ornery. Grandpere says he's made it ‘an art form’. When will we see them?”

“Spring break. Not long now. And Magic Flute just before, in New York. You remember?”

“Yes. I get to wear Hannibal's dress and my locket”

Will smiles to himself, oh Hannibal would just love that, that's exactly how things get started at Abs’ school,

“Yes you will. And the shoes too if you like. Ok. We're gonna start to get ready to go in three minutes. You got everything? You check your bag, don't forget juice. And no Hello Kitty. No arguing, she wants a day off. She said. She needs to gossip with the other kitties. Probably about Tentacles and the trouser suit”

“When you and Hannibal get married will you both have trouser suits?”

Will opens his mouth and closes it again. Ahh, Molly had it right then. He’ll have to warn Hannibal, though he's probably guessed as well.

“An excellent question which I think we will hold over for when I've thought of an answer. Don't pout. I don't want to make one up. Ok? School bag, no kitty and I'll make sure Dragon is ok.”

Reluctantly perhaps she gets down from the table, and goes to gather her things. It was a good and very typical daddy answer. Still, they should think about it. These things are important. If you're going to get married. Of course, you don't have to. But Jimmy wants to be a flower boy. He definitely said so. Abigail isn't quite sure what a flower boy is but Jimmy would probably be a cute one. He's funny. For a grown up. Actually her daddy has lots of funny friends. Though Peter at school says they do a thoroughly miserable job.

……..

“Will, thanks for yesterday. We had a great time. You got a few minutes? My office? Get Cassie to do whatever horrible thing it is you're currently doing. Yeah?”

Will looks up at Jack, he sounds more wired and worried than usual, not Bella unwell again? Damn!

“Sure Jack, Cassie you ok with this?”

Cassie nods and slides along a lab bench to look at whatever thing it is that Will’s been on. In Jack’s office he indicates a seat to Will,

“I’ll cut to it. I talked to the General yesterday. I understand what he wants. I'm going to talk to my boss to see how far we can go with the FBI angle ok?”

Will nods,

“I'm sorry, I really didn't mean for you to be ambushed, I guess he saw it as an opportunity.”

“Uh huh, he said you’d back-pedalled fast when it came up in conversation. Thank you. But we’ll see what we can do. I've got two other things. One, Brian says you've been having headaches. No excuses. By the end of this week. Our guy. Ok? Good. Third thing, we've got another body. Yeah I know. Fresh. Just found. I want to send you with the others. Can Hannibal manage Abigail?”

“Wow. When? Oh, wait, today? Shit. Ok. Err. I have no idea. I'll ask Molly too. In case. I'm not even sure my go bag is in my car. Damn. Wait? Do we have to fly? Where are we going?”

“Still East Coast. Pennsylvania, along the I70. You know?”

Will nods and slumps,

“Just the four of us or you too?”

“Yeah, plus someone from press liaison to run point. I think Freddie Lounds will get wind. Might even give her the heads up.”

“Ok. Frederick too?”

“Good point. Frederick too. I'll call him.”

Jack rubs a weary hand over his head,

“You go get Abigail sorted. I think maybe an hour from now. You be able to get together enough gear for then?”

Will nods, there's always a spare tee somewhere in the lab. Or he could sleep in a clean lab coat? At a push? Though last time he'd done so he'd had to share a room with Bev and they'd fought over the subsequent photos she'd taken when he was asleep.

Ok then. This is what it looks like to have a a childcare thing when you have an actual partner with whom you share a house, who in theory works 9-5 or 09:00 to 17:00, and has staff, and in theory should be able to collect an eight year old. In an emergency. Will chews his lip. Trust, trust, trust. Time for him to put up or shut up. He gets out his cell.

“Hannibal? I'm sorry if this is a bad moment? And I have no idea if this is even feasible. But there's a break in the East Coast Case. I have to go to Pennsylvania. Can you get Abigail this afternoon and then, well, Abigail sit. For at least the next day or so?”

At the other end Hannibal raise both eyebrows, well, he has made it to Colonel through a mixture of hard work and imagination, though this is somewhat unexpected and outside his experience so far,

“Of course Will. 16:00 from school? I'm sure we can manage. And you? You're not going alone are you?”

“No, the whole team plus Fred and Jack. New body just surfaced. No one's done anything stupid with it.”

“Be careful then. Text me anything you think I need to know. And Private Lass. I'm not even going to pretend I can succeed on my own.”

“Thank you. I'll call you tonight. Barring disaster.”

“Perfect.”

They both finish their end of the call, Hannibal smiling at the possibility of the next few days and focussed time with Abigail and even Tentacles. Will frowning at the thought of focussed time with the East Coast Killer. Though the bugs? The bugs might be great.

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Chapter End Notes

Well oh my goodness... chapter fifty!

Woo hoo guys, you rock... thank you so much for coming along on this particular ride...

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 51

Mischa looks down at her desk and then back out of her office window. The tree in the square outside is steadily making its way into spring. She debates whether she might be too. She wonders what it would have been like to open and read the letters the other way round. She'd read Hannibal and Will's letter first and then Bedelia's. It might have been very different if she'd read Bedelia's first.

>Dearest Mischa,

Anthony has managed something very stupid. And how many times shall we say that do you think? Through a series of unfortunate coincidences he accidentally let slip to Hannibal that we had been together. I know. You wouldn't think it possible. It involved your umbrella which Hannibal recognised. I didn't know it was a gift from him.

No matter. The damage is done. He was singularly unimpressed with Anthony for the deception, with me, also for the deception, and I regret to say with you as well.

From what you have described I know Hannibal doesn't do well with such things. So I am very very sorry for it.

I won't pretend to imagine this will precipitate some positive change for us. I fear rather the opposite. But I thought you should know as soon as possible so I shall say no more at this point. If you can bring yourself to please forgive Anthony I hope you shall, I am sure he was his usual oblivious rather than intentionally malicious self. I'm not sure which is worse. And Mischa, please, I hope also to plead my own case, forgive me.

I am full of regrets and remain, yours,

Bedelia<

Mischa reads Bedelia's letter again. She can feel the tension emanating from it. Bedelia would hate every aspect of this. Anthony's accidental stupidity in whatever form it took. Bedelia's own lack of control in the situation; her frustration and grief all bundled up together. Any plans she might have had pruned back too hard before they might even have begun to grow.

She smiles then at the other letter, the one she opened first. Although it's written in Hannibal's hand she can hear Will in it too, they've both signed it which had made her smile when she first read it. Oh yes. Dear, sweet, lovely Will. Who mends, as Hannibal had said, as he breathes.

>Dearest Mischa,

This is version three of a letter. Will was singularly unimpressed with the first two attempts so this is now a joint enterprise. As so many things are.

We are doing well, though Tentacles is to marry a bientot kitty which as you might imagine has us all on alert! Of course we understand the parallels. Though both Will and I are fighting over which of us is actually Tentacles in the complexities of Abigail's imagination. I'd like to think it is me as I've been tasked with making its clothes (though gender is fluid for Tentacles I believe and I remain

certain). Will is less than impressed to be a bientot kitty, though I think he would wear a beret well. He's making a face. The battle continues.

The dogs have settled into a grumbled acceptance of the hierarchy. Will is still the Alpha, though I'm told quite seriously by Abigail who has a grasp on such things that Buster is still Beta but I'm alright as the ‘bitch’ in this scenario alongside Winston. She remains a stoic ally. Winston I mean, though Abigail does a good job too. I cannot even begin to describe Will’s mirth at Abigail's analysis. There was a lot of excessive loud laughter. Excessive and loud. Wonderful.

I imagine you may be waiting for the volley of accusations and recriminations. I also wonder if Bedelia’s letter, which I have no doubt she has sent, has reached you first? If so, then I hope you will not be already sinking into sloughs of despair. Will and I, well, alright, Will first and he pummelled me into submission, say, dearest Mischa, you are our dearest Mischa. And we hope only for happiness for you. I intended to be much more drawn out and tortuous about it but he gave me the eye and the whole ‘and this is helpful how exactly?’ Look. I bow to his superior understanding of the heart.

We love you Mischa. There. It was a simple thing to say. Perhaps we are as adults not as clear or as generous as we might be. If you've found love? Why that's an amazing thing. We are testimony to the uncertainties and risks that exist in the world. We are all realists and have been treated to sharp reminders of the hostilities of life. Where there is love? And not fear? You told Will to choose love. I am forever grateful to you. We commend your own words to you. Perhaps that's annoying of us? Too smug?

I'd hazard the comment then that that is your fault! Your fault. We blame at least some of our happiness on you. How terrible.

Anthony also said there was just a faint possibility of some trade thing bringing you here briefly? We all hope so. You might even make it in time for the toy’s wedding. Oh dear. And probably this is enough for now. Toys, dogs, love? It's real Mischa. Real.

With very much love,

Hannibal and Will<

……

“Alright Will?”

“Thanks Jims yeah, fine. I'd even got a bag in the car. I think it got left there during the move”

“No lab coat thing?”

“I brought one anyway, for a robe”

The team laugh. The big SUV is a good ride and though they take turns driving it's Brian who usually carries the load. He's the calmest by far. They've two other cars with them, one with Jack and the press liaison guy in it. And Frederick has brought his own car so he can come and go a bit more freely than the others. Will is hoping to have a little chat with him about the toy’s forthcoming nuptials and how to manage those aspirations.

“Molly getting Abigail?”

Bev grins, she knows the deal, Will winks at her,

“She's the back up. Nope. Hannibal's in charge. Though it's possible Private Lass or Sargeant Budge will actually collect her today, they're on the list of ‘permitted to collect’. The school secretary is always very entertained, he says our list is longer than anyone else's, he always gets excited when we add new people. Hannibal's got meetings almost continuously this week.”

There's a small silence in the vehicle. Bev grins out the window as Brian and Jimmy digest the news,

“You've turned Abigail loose on Hannibal? You total bastard!”

“I know. Good isn't it? And he has told the General about this new development”

“Ahh the delights of the poster boy’s actual work as opposed to just a nice theory?”

“Yup. He wanted the whole real deal he got it! Perhaps faster than he'd anticipated. And I'm expecting minor chaos when I get back. And possibly Buster having been sent to the kennels.”

“Tell Bev about Hannibal being the bitch”

Bev turns a questioning eyebrow on Will,

“What the? Will? God l love your family, that's just wildly unlikely”

Will smiles back at her,

“You know I think I'd never thought I'd hear anyone say that. That's pretty great actually. We love you too Bev. All of you. Thanks. I don't even care about the lab coat right now”

……..

Roland Umber looks at the dead moth. He must have got the food wrong, or the water, or something. It's just this one though. The others are alright. He sighs sadly to himself and carefully retrieves it from the tank. Tries not to disturb the others. Still. He wouldn't have killed one deliberately and he can at least mount it properly. It'll look beautiful. Such lovely colours. The little tiny skull. Incredible really.

……..

“Hannibal Hannibal Hannibal, Private Lass made Mac’n’cheese and put cauliflower in it so I couldn't taste it. We put Tabasco sauce in it too. Not very much. Because that would be hot. Just to stop it tasting white”

Hannibal dumps his briefcase on a chair in the kitchen and drops a small kiss on Abigail's head. Tentacles and two Kitties are also seated at the table.

“Hello, Abigail. Did you have salad too? I think salad too. It means I won't eat it on my own?”

He smiles at Miriam.

“Thank you so much. The General has shifted one or two things this week so tomorrow should be fine. I'll speak to Will later we’ll find out how they're getting on.”

“Not a problem Sir. The rest of the mac is in the oven. I heated the remains of the casserole you made as well if you want to eat some of that? I spoke to Sargeant Budge and he's sent me the session notes from today. I'll look at them later. It's all good”

“Are you going to stay here or get back?”

“Back Sir. One of my housemates is doing some late night thing involving gin and two of the Brits. I wouldn't want to let her down.”

“What's gin?”

“A drink that makes you fall over if you have too much. And gives you a sore head the next day”

Abigail considers this a little,

“Private Lass don't have too much. Not if it will make your head hurt?”

Miriam smiles, such wise words which she might or might not ignore.

“Alright Abi, I'm off. I expect I'll see you soon. Don't forget to show the Colonel the French knitting snake? Ok?”

Abigail nods eagerly. The French knitting snake grows so fast and though she has no clue what to do with it it's a lot of fun to make. Sargeant Budge’s girlfriend showed her how. She's going to show her some things she can use it for but first it has to get as tall as her and daddy and Hannibal all together.

With Miriam gone Hannibal retrieves the rest if the mac ‘n’ cheese, adds some casserole to it and then empties a large helping of salad onto the side of the plate.

“Salad? Like the French do? In a separate course? To keep me company?”

Abigail makes a face. Salad? She looks at the green salad chopped very small with a vinaigrette dressing. And olives. She nods,

“Thank you. Not too much, I ate a lot of cauliflower.”

He piles her plate and whispers,

“Don't tell the Kitties I've given you so much, they'll be jealous. They're looking the other way.”

He carefully angles the toys to look away from their plates. Abigail looks at him. Yes, alright, quite clever. She makes a start on the salad.

……..

Freddie Lounds leans against the bar top, ok none of the FBI guys sitting spread iver three tables look delighted to see her but they don't look too pissed off either. They'd have known she'd have caught up to them pretty quick, and ok, so maybe Frederick said slightly too much. But hey. They're all here now. Bygones.

“Definite connection then? And escalating? Damn guys? That's bad. And a back catalogue too? What you got for me? Dispersal? Victimology? Schedule? Profile update?”

Jacks sighs wearily,

“Ms Lounds, this is Devon Silvestri, he'll run point with you and our Fred over all the press stuff. You've played fair so far. Keep it that way and we'll keep you a little head of the game? Alright? And don't try and drink my team under the table. If you want a quote ask Devon don't try and drunktank it out of them. Ok?”

Freddie wrinkles her nose, oh, no fun then!

“Yeah. alright. Just don't hold back on me, or there'll be trouble and I won't play nice.”

The team nod. Ok. Over to Devon, they turn and smile at him, he grins, he loves Freddie Lounds, this is going to be a ball!

“Ms Lounds, oh boy, I know you're the best at this but I've got some great ideas for a sell. Wanna hear about it? I'm buying?”

Freddie quirks a smile, alright then Mr quite cute Silvestri, you're welcome.

……..

“Abigail? Do you want to speak to your daddy? Here, he's on the line?”

Abigail looks at Hannibal from across the living room. Oops. She's going to be caught right this second. It's just a little bit later than she should be up. She didn't exactly lie. She just didn't quite tell the truth when asked about bed time. Oh dear. Hannibal will be sad with her. That's worse than him being cross. Probably. She drags her feet across the floor,

“Thank you. Hello daddy”

“Hello Abigail. Now I'm guessing you didn't quite tell Hannibal the whole story about bed time on a school night? Uh huh?”

“I think so. Shall I tell him now?”

“It's alright. It's the first time. Next time there will be words. Alright? Now, are you ok?”

“Yes! We had mac n cheese and a very big salad and cauliflower and then stewed fruit. And then I did my math. And then I drew a picture of Buster and Winston. They’ve been quite good”

“Good. I'm glad about the salad Abs. And is Hannibal ok? You haven't worn him out?”

“I don't think so. He's reading a book and has a very small glass of something that looks like blackcurrant, but I don't think it is as he wouldn't let me have any. But he did make me proper blackcurrant. Am I allowed a story if it's short?”

“If it's short. I love you poppet. No fudging it with Hannibal? Ok?”

“Alright. Shall I give the phone back? I love you too daddy”

She hands the phone back to Hannibal,

“She's pulled the wool over your eyes, she should have gone to bed half an hour ago. I've told her she's not in trouble this first time! Next time though! I should have told you”

“I should have asked. Not to worry. Shall I call you later or are you going to turn in soon?”

“Another couple of hours? How about you?”

“Maybe ninety minutes. I'll text you and we can see. Alright?”

“Sounds good. Ok. I better go. We're in an awful bar, and the local coroner is making faces. I'm asking one hell of a mess of questions here”

He sounds cheery and Hannibal smiles at the thought of bugs and general detritus, albeit focussed round a new death. What odd things we make our lives about. They end the call.

“Well Abigail, quick bath, teeth, story, bed. All in ten minutes? Quick quick?”

She nods, phew. Not in trouble. Daddy meant it and Hannibal isn't being cross either. Close call.

……..

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 52

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“So, everything go okay last night?”

“Yeah Sarge. No problem. Here's all the summary stuff too."

"You okay? You're looking a bit tired. Not too much for you? You can say, the boss wouldn't mind. Heck I bet Frankie would be up for it. She got all broody on the way home Sunday.”

“You ready for that Sarge?”

“Sassy! Watch it. Yeah, I've got an eye on the whole family thing, Frankie’s keen.”

“wow Sarge. That's amazing! But I'm okay, it's just the gin singing long after the rest of us have gone home. We went out with the British delegation last night. God they could really ‘neck it back!’”

“‘Neck it back?’ That's fantastic. You want more coffee or water or something?"

“I'm ahead of you!"

She holds up two water bottles. He smiles at her and toasts with his half empty coffee cup. Then he looks back down at his paperwork. God it's week three already. And it's good. It's really good. His girl? His girl for sure. She'd be a good mom too. So. Maybe.

……

“thank you Miss Bloom. This Friday then? Can we bring a thumb drive? Use a projector in the main hall? Our press guy has some very nice pictures he’ll sulk over if I don't ask"

Alana Bloom smiles at the Colonel. It had been a very small risk to allow Abigail the trip in term time but it seems to have all worked out. Even Clark seems to still be enjoying a degree of modest hero worship for Hannibal. And one or two other parents will probably come along if the soldiers do a presentation about the program. And the school principal is pleased as well. And Abigail seems to be doing extra well now her second daddy is home.

Though Alana knows the separation will be hard, so, she’d better give some thought to that. How to say goodbye as well as hello. The hamster might be a place to start. When friends leave, when we make new friends, when friendships change. Might be good for more than just Abigail. The tides and fluctuations of classroom groupings test everyone big and small. The world in a grain of sand, painful in your shoe. She smiles at the Colonel.

“Yes, as many good visuals as possible. Nothing too frightening. I'd love some positive images of locals, children playing football, in class, just normal things. Not just victims. You understand?”

“I do. I'm glad you do too. Friday then.”

……

“ Will? Fantastic. Yes I've got the moth. Your courier is good”

Eldon Stammetts pauses to listen to whatever Will says on the other end of the line.

“No, no, your instincts are good. Same family, subspecies. Minor variant. Maybe your unsub ran out of specimens.”

There is more talking at the other end.

“Yes. Okay. Good point. I'll get one of the kids on it…. No…… I wouldn't dream of it. You okay up there?”

He listens some more. He and Will go way back. And actually it had been him who introduced Will to Margot. He has mixed feelings about it. Sure Abigail is a bright spark but really? That was just an ongoing train wreck for, God, years. It still bugs him. He catches him self. Yeah right.

“Will, you know you keep mentioning your head? Anyone else fed that back to you?"

Will clearly says some more.

“Will? Shut up. Do what your boss says. Don't leave it. It probably is your eyes or something but don't be an idiot. How are you going to play spot the difference ehh, if you need a new prescription!?”

He listens again.

“Am I? Good. I'll ask you next time we talk. I'll let you know about the database alright? Take care. I mean it.”

He laughs at something Will says. At the other end Will closes his cell phone.

“Okay, only a subspecies. They’re going to do a database search. See who’s raising more than just the one type. Or importing them. We’re lucky they're so rare. Fred, Jack, can we keep this detail out of the press? Well, away from Freddie?”

"Working on it. Says something though? "

“The general thing or the specific?”

“Well, both I’d say. Using something that ultimately we can probably track in the first place. And now a sub variant? Suggests either he's raising them or he knows someone who is. And still has some interest in us knowing there is a connection between the cases. Or us staking him? Or is staking some kind of something?"

“aren't they all at this kind of activity level?"

“Sure. Will? Anything else for us?”

“Not really. I told Brian I'd hang on until tomorrow help out with the recording.”

“Yeah? Good job. Abigail alright?”

"Bonding time with Hannibal"

"He stepping up?"

"She conned him into an extra half hour of staying up last night and still got a story at the end!"

Both of Will's colleagues laugh, as though they, both childfree, would manage any better. Yeah, they probably know it. Fred grins at him,

"God, she's just like Buster isn't she? I watched him at the weekend. He's fitted Hannibal In hasn't he? The domestic hierarchy?"

"Oh yeah!" Will laughs "and then some. You'll love this, both of you"

They do.

……

"Colonel Brown, thank you for coming in, sit please"

Matthew Brown draws up a chair in the General's office. Really he didn't have a choice in the matter, but he appreciates the gesture.

"Sir, how can I help?"

"I won't muck you around about this. This crap with Hannibal Lecter. I've heard the backstory. And I've got a report here from the MPs, we've got a compliant against you. Civilian. Not the Colonel himself, though god knows he could. I want to know what I can do to get you over this hump. You must know he's got Generals Buddish and Davies behind him right now. And I owe both of them. And you owe me. And you know how this goes?"

Matthew nods. The General isn't done yet though.

"I'm sorry Matthew. It's time to suck it up. Shit isn't it? I know."

The General looks at him with possibly a very small amount of sympathy. But not much. The General basically prevented him from getting a discharge, or jail time, or both.. so yeah, he owes him. And he's stuck by him. So far. He knows it. Matthew takes a deep breath.

"I honestly think Hannibal might still come round"

He pauses,

"But, and I appreciate this, I am the only person who does think so"

The General eyes him,

"You are. I've had Colonel Lecter in. I don't know him very well. Bit too upright and stiff for my style. But he was positive about you, what you've achieved, what he thinks your potential is. He won't press a complaint going forwards. But, he was also very clear he wants to be left alone and his partner and the child. Really Matthew. Whatever it was, or you hoped it would be, it's done. He's utterly serious about the Graham fellow. Even I could see that through all the starch. There's a good chance he'll get re-assigned back here. And possibly promoted. This can only get worse for you if you pursue it. Do you want that? I won't cut you loose. But do you understand? This is it."

The General looks him straight on, Matthew knows he's been extraordinarily lucky so far. A mix of his record, his hard work, his father's influence, his own connections hard won, have all helped. Damn. And it'd be stupid to throw it all away.

"I was going to suggest a mediated conversation to help me finally put it all to bed"

He winces internally at his own phrasing, passes a hand across his chin, rubbing there,

"But actually I think I'm just prolonging my own agony. I'll just have to accept Hannibal really is serious about this guy. I fucked it up. My own stupid fault. Damn."

He takes another deep breath, aware of the General watching him, still some sympathy there, but also determination,

"Alright. I'll apologise to Hannibal. Dr Graham too. I'll tell them both I'm done. I'll have to swallow some pride. But it's better to get past this. I'm making it worse."

"He doesn't want to see you humiliated Matthew"

"I think I've managed that on my own"

The General gives an acquiescing nod, maybe so,

"Yes, perhaps. Really, he just wants his partner and little girl to feel secure. You'll know the sorry story there. The blowback there if you caused any grief for them would be enormous. Do you understand? You'd be done. Got it?"

"Sir. I have. I'll let Colonel Lecter know. I realise this is all on me. I apologise for any embarrassment I've caused you Sir."

"Alright then. We're done here. Are you going to this Formal? A chance to re-establish some sensible parameters?"

"Sir? It might be better if I stayed away. Show I mean it?"

"Yes. That might be so. That's all Colonel. And Matthew, I am sorry."

Matthew nods and as he leaves he thinks a whole range of things. Feels the pain of it. All over again. And still no one to blame but himself. God, he was an idiot. Ok. Time to suck up and nut up. If the shoe was on the other foot Hannibal would apologise very graciously. He can probably manage something half decent. Fuck it. He should make it better than that. Maybe claw back a little dignity. Here, at the end?

…….

In the opticians Will squints again at the chart.

"God, they've really got worse. No wonder my head has been killing me."

"Yeah? When were you last due?"

"Hmm? good question. Six months ago maybe? It's been a bit ridiculous"

“Oh what, work, life, and everything squeezed in between?”

Will smiles at the guy, aware that he looks like something from a steam punk movie, with the optometrist’s lens holders on his face.

“Single dad, tough job, new relationship. I don't even live here. We're on a work thing and I've got a spare hour.”

“Oh what? Everyone moaning at you moaning about it? Almost every guy who comes in here has had their arm twisted, by the wife, by the girlfriend, their friends, colleagues”

“Yeah? Guilty as charged! what kind of change in the prescription?”

“You do a lot of near work?"

“Yeah. And some. Science stuff, slides and scopes”

The optometrist looks at him,

“You're not here about the girl are you?”

Will pauses,

“Did you know her? She had glasses with her”

“Well, there's only us here. If she is local, I probably saw her here, there’re three of us in the practice. Did she have a card or anything?”

“ I didn't see that kind of stuff. We don't know she is local.”

The guy carefully take the glasses from Will's face.

“I'll be sad either way. I see the press is beginning to show up.”

“I'm sorry for that. That's kind of inevitable.”

“Money out of misery? Sorry for that too”

He sighs,

“Yeah. So, okay, how do you want to do this? I can make you a temporary pair? If you wait it'll take me an hour or so. And I'll give you a script to take to your usual place. You got your insurance card handy?”

Will digs it out of his wallet, tucked behind a photo of Abigail and Hannibal, he smiles at it, and then hands the card over. The optometrist nods at the wallet and photo,

“Your guy and daughter?”

Will blinks at him. He's ongoingly surprised both of people’s tolerance and their desire to know, the curiosity,

“Yeah. New thing. He's a soldier, active service overseas, here for six more weeks”

“well good luck for that. Come back in an hour. Same frames near enough, alright? They make you look brainy”

Will laughs,

“I am brainy! The glasses do help me look it though”

Chapter End Notes

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You're still reading?

Thank you so much... xxxx

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 53

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dragon hands Molson a cup of coffee. They're having a go at an engine in a truck that's been donated to the church.

“Thanks. I don't know. It might be a bit of dirt in the carburettor? I'm not so good on engines. Bit of joinery? Sure. This. Not so much. Too complicated. I like easy.”

Dragon smiles a little, self perception is a complex thing,

“I think your son-in-law might manage it? Mason said it's his thing”

“Will? Sure. He's good with this stuff. Learnt it off his daddy. Actually I could ask him. Either of them, Will is bringing Abigail for Spring Break. His pa usually comes around. French speaker, nice guy, bit hard-bitten. Mason talked about Will?”

“Yes. We went to Will’s house to meet him and the little girl. You should be proud of her. She's fine.”

Molson nods, his sweetie, he frowns a little then, he's heard about the new temporary housing set up from Mason, there'd been a certain amount of swearing and cussing, though he's cut back on the blaspheming,

“You meet the guy then?”

“I did. He was very kind. He got the ok from the Pastor”

“Did he? That surprises me some”

“He's a man of truth and courage. Careful too. Caring. Good in a Soldier. Some of his Unit were there”

“Yeah? What did they have to say?”

“Young Private. With him when their base was bombed. Said he was fantastic. Her words. His Sargeant looks up to him.”

Dragon looks at Molson aware that what he's saying is deeply unsettling for the old man.

“You liked him?”

“I don't know him well enough yet to say. But I could see he was liked by those that did know him. His boss was there. Three star. And his wife. She's a Federal Judge”

Molson makes a small noise. That's some CV. Well heck.

……..

“Simonetta? Come and read this letter from Mischa. Simonetta?”

The Count’s wife joins him in the yellow sitting room,

“What is it? Why are you shouting?”

He hands her the letter he's just read, she reads it and then looks at him, a mix of expressions on her face.

“If you're about to say ‘Mischa too?’ Then before you do I think it's a total accident and nothing in our parenting.”

Simonetta nods. He knows her so well, she had been about to say something of the sort.

“Oh, you're right. Of course you are. I suppose I just imagine it will cause them pain. Mischa has been so unhappy recently, and Hannibal has rarely had much happiness in love.”

“Well, maybe things are shifting. I honestly think it's likely Hannibal and Will will marry. How will you be with that?”

“I shall wear a new hat and maybe a new suit and hang the expense.”

The Count smiles in delight at his wife,

“My dear, you are an endless source of joy to me. What colours?”

“It depends on the season. Why?”

“I'd like to buy them for you of course. Maybe I can improve on the dove grey?”

“You look so handsome in it though. We’ll have to persuade them to not make it a winter wedding. New coats would be exorbitant”

“I think there's a velvet cloak in one of the closets, if we start airing it now it won't smell of mothballs by the end of the year!”

“I realise we're now talking about a wedding when they've made no mention of such a thing.”

“I know. Glorious isn't it. Shall I write to Mischa and tell her to go to Washington, and to bring Bedelia to meet us?”

“She is married”

“Yes. And you were engaged. Which was as good as back then”

They smile at each other like naughty children. They'd been in so much trouble and had almost eloped . Simonetta had had to return the ring and a whole pile of presents and all the bookings had had to be undone. Worth it though. Almost fifty-five years now.

…….

Hannibal glances at Abigail in the rear view mirror of the Bentley. She strapped securely into the booster seat and is currently watching through the window.

“How was school?”

“It was okay”

“Only okay?”

Abigail shrugs. One of her friends was a bit mean this morning, but she doesn't really want to say.

“Abigail?”

"It doesn't matter. They don't know anything anyway.”

“My darling, who doesn't know what?”

Abigail sniffs a bit. Hannibal immediately goes on full alert. Abigail sniffing is the equivalent of a siren going off back at base.

“Abigail, I’ve realised I have forgotten something from the market. Would you be willing to delay for a small diversion?”

He senses rather than sees her actually nod.

“Thank you. I've even got a shopping bag!”

She smiles a little, sniffing abating somewhat.

Once they've parked Hannibal extends a hand which Abigail clings onto with both of hers. Alright then, not a happy little girl.

“What shall we eat tonight? Do you have any ideas?”

“daddy makes pie from shepherds on Tuesdays. They're not really shepherds, he just says that."

"Shall we do the same? Then you can do a taste comparison. Does it usually have potato on top?"

“I guess, usually. If you like.”

"Alright then. I often put cheese in with the potato, how does that sound?”

“Maybe. Can I choose the cheese?”

“yes I think so. We can make it together. Are you good at mashing potato?"

"Daddy uses the whizzer"

"I don't know what a whizzer is. Can you show me?”

Abigail smiles, the whizzer is the spawn of the devil according to her daddy and has caused major disasters in the past.

“Ok, we can try. Daddy says it's temperamental”

"Does he now?”

“Yes. What does that mean? He also says it is the very spawn of the devil”

“Have there been incidents? Buster levels of bad?"

Abigail laughs and squeezes Hannibal’s hand. Maybe a little better then?

“Katie says you like Miss Bloom”

“Miss Bloom? Your teacher? She is very nice, you like her too don't you?”

“Katie says you were talking to her this morning and she laughed and put her hand on your arm.”

Hannibal frowns a little, trying to remember, he has zero recollection of the moment.

“Perhaps she did. Adults sometimes do that to show they're trying to be nice. I mostly like her because she's your teacher and she likes you. I wouldn't know her otherwise.”

“Katie says you probably like Miss Bloom better than daddy.”

“You know you said Katie doesn't know anything? You were right. She doesn't know anything about this at all. Miss Bloom is very nice. But I love you and Will. You are both better than nice as far as I'm concerned. This cheese?”

He passes a small pack of gruyere to Abigail, she considers,

“Maybe? is it stringy?”

“When it melts. Is that good or bad?”

“Good. Yes please. What's better than nice?”

“Well, do you have friends you really really like? Maybe Lily “

She nods.

“And even more than Lilly?”

“Maybe Beverly. Though it's hard to choose”

“You don't have to. Do you love anyone more than Beverly?”

“I love mommy. But that's all funny now. And I love you. And daddy, I love daddy.”

"Well I'm honoured. It's very special to be loved alongside your mommy and even your daddy. Though it's alright for him to be top of the tree Abigail, I understand that. I think I'm alongside Buster and Winston”

She giggles,

“I love them too. Don't tell them I missed them out”

“I promise”

“Even when Buster tries to growl?”

“Even then”

"I do love you lots though Hannibal"

"Thank you. And I you. It's not a competition really but on my tree you and Will, Mischa, my parents, my aunt and uncle, you're all at the very top. You're like the different points of a star and together you light up all the tree. There are little lights and stars on the tree but you are at the very top.”

“Is Miss Bloom like one of the felt reindeer you sent at Christmas?”

"Maybe. Did it have sequins?"

"Some. Winston ate a few!"

“Well, is Miss Bloom sequiny or not?”

“Not very”

“Well, maybe it is her then. Alright my lovely girl?”

“Better, a bit. Thank you. You do love us don't you?”

"Yes. And it is alright to ask whenever you need to. And even though I have to go back to my base in five weeks I will still love you then, and when I come back next time."

Abigail considers this, she is still trying to understand the Hannibal really will have to go away and that he will come back afterwards. Her daddy says if she likes they can all go and talk to someone so that she can really believe it. She sighs to herself. Even if Hannibal married daddy it wouldn't mean he would come back for sure. But it would maybe help. Wouldn't it? Though it didn't with mommy.

She thinks about some of the other things said in class by her friends. It's hard to know quite who to believe sometimes. But Hannibal is always honest with her and sure about things. So maybe she should try to be Hannibal sure too?

…….

Gretchen Speck closes the door of her apartment and double locks it behind her. No point in being stupid about it. She walks to the bus stop and joins the usual throng there. They know each other well enough to exchange a few words, huddle slightly if it's raining hard, enquire about family members even.

Today though everyone is a bit subdued. A body turning up in the neighbourhood does that to a community. It dampens everyone down. Whether or not the person turns out to be local. If they're local of course everyone is upset, usually only a few degrees of separation or none. If it's someone from outside then there's also the indignation of why pick us, why here, what did we do, go away, leave us alone. And of course, always the question of who? Circling and suppurating in bars, the hairdresser, in corner shops, in the line at the drug-store. Gossip; the devil’s radio.

…….

“New temporary glasses for now. I'll get the script filled when I'm back”

“Thank you for going. It's a weight off my mind”

“You were worried?”

“Will? Of course I was worried. It also made me conscious of the fact that I should have you added you as one of my next of kin in my records, in case something happens to me. Otherwise the army will waltz right on by you. Not through prejudice just paperwork”

“Ok. That's a good idea. I'll ask Jack about it. I'm sure personnel can manage that. It'd be just my luck to get shot and they won't let you in the ER. Though, hey, could you disguise yourself with a white coat and all? You must have got the patter down?”

At the other end of the line Hannibal laughs.

“I might talk my way in, and promptly get myself struck off the register when I throw myself at your bedside wailing with grief”

“I like the throw yourself at me bit. The grief and wailing sounds ominous”

“If you'd been shot I'd think it an entirely appropriate response”

“You're so sweet”

Hannibal snorts a little, even Mischa wouldn't call him sweet.

“Is Abs ok now?”

“I think so. Her friend Katie Pimms could do with a good listening to”

“Ok, I'll bite? Listening to?”

“To find out exactly what complicated and inaccurate things she's carrying round in her head so she can be helped to see the error of her ways”

“You'd be a terrifying school teacher. Actually I can see why you do like Miss Bloom. You've got a similar approach.”

“You like her too”

“I like both of you. But I don't want to have phone sex with her”

“Will! You say such appalling things utterly out of the blue”

“I know. You like it”

Hannibal sighs,

“I do”

“So, phone sex? Good idea or bad?”

“I have no idea?”

“Really? Neither of us? Excellent? Never had phone sex?”

“I've thought about sex whilst on the phone. Does that count?”

“No. I don't think so. I don't think I want to know about who”

“You, whenever we talk on the phone”

“Oh”

“Yes ‘oh’. What gave you the idea?”

“How much will you hate it if I say it was Freddie Lounds?”

Chapter End Notes

.....

You'll maybe note sometimes it's 'ok' and sometimes 'okay', if I use the speech recognition software it always spells it okay, otherwise it's me typing and I'm lazy.

I've added 'happy ending' to the tags for everyone worried that I might actually turn out to be a singularly ungentle writer. It's not that kind of story. Happy ending folks.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 54

Chapter Notes

Not quite as much phone sex as they'd like. But some.

NSFW...

Jack sighs. Of all the shitty, fuck awful, and what hell is the time? Oh. Only midnight. Shit. It feels much later. Goddamit. And now he'll have to get everyone up and on the road. And just fuck it. He thinks about booting his cell into the waste bin of the hotel room. He looks around. Fucking hell, they've had one night here. Wearily he starts to re-pack. And Ohio again? Shit.

……

“Who was it at the door?”

“Jimmy. Look, I can't tell you how sorry I am. Jack got a call. Ohio. We have to go now. I won't be back until tomorrow night maybe even Thursday or Friday. Can you really hang on until then. I can ask Molly.”

“I think Sargeant Budge can collect Abigail tomorrow. He'll have to bring her back to Washington. Is that alright? We've meetings all afternoon. But she can sit in a corner with Tentacles and drawing things. Would that be alright. I'd rather have her close”

Will smiles. He might almost have imagined that Hannibal would be dismayed about the interrupted phone sex. But he's worried about Abigail. God. Can he get any crazier for Hannibal? Possibly not. He shifts a little where he's sitting on the edge of the bed.

“Will she hear anything she shouldn't?”

“The group I'm in are working in Russian. So, no. Not really”

“Ok. I'd rather she was with you too, especially if she's getting flack. Sorry”

“Don't be. I'll take her in on Friday whatever happens. We've got the school presentation then.”

“Damn. I want to be back for that”

“If you are that would be excellent, but don't break any speed limits.”

“It'll be Brian who drives”

Hannibal smiles. That's almost certainly a very good thing.

“You're leaving now?”

“Three minutes. I can hear Jimmy moaning about it in the room next door”

“Possibly not the best location for phone sex then?”

“I honestly don't care. I miss you”

“I miss you too Will”

“I wanted to make you come”

“I have no doubt you would”

“I had a whole scenario worked out. Damn. I was going to imagine you coming straight down my throat”

Hannibal swallows almost as a reflex,

“That's…”

He can hear the grin in Will’s voice,

“I know. Think about it Hannibal. I'd swallow round you, make you come down my throat. Hold the back of your thighs tight. God. I'd love that right now. I know how you like to finish. But you wouldn't be able to stop yourself. Are you wet now?”

“Will!”

“I want you to. When I put the phone down and get dressed again and go and get in the SUV and drive fuck knows where. I want you to think about me sucking you. Give it everything you've got. I would if I was there. Will you? Please”

“My love.”

“Good job. Ok. I can hear doors and grumbling. And I've got to pack. I love you”

……

Everyone in the SUV is miserable. Will is slightly flushed but no one makes a joke about it. Bev looks tired and annoyed. Jimmy is grumbling about all the stuff they've had to leave to the B team to come and collect. Brian is looking resigned to everyone being fed up for another two hours and then getting no sleep. Again. For the rest of the day. Maybe tonight, tomorrow night. Wednesday night? What the hell? He's probably too tired to be driving right now. God. If this is another new body they are in very deep hell.

……

In the morning, early, Hannibal wakes and smiles at the semen dried on his stomach and chest. He'd left it last night. It's slightly itchy now. Pulling at his skin. He'd done it deliberately. So he could imagine it as Will’s. Where he'd come if they were together, Hannibal pressed into him, thrusting against one another. Kissing. Whispering. Will clutching him round his neck. His legs twisted round his back. Hannibal's absolute favourite position. One of Will’s.

He craves the deepness they can manage when he leans on all fours and Hannibal takes him from behind. Hannibal prefers to be standing if Will is fucking him, something about it, maybe because it is like that first time. Oh. Only three weeks ago. Less.

Hannibal smiles and scratches at his stomach and chest. Perfect. He craves everything about Will. Not just the sex. Though it's something else. Phone sex? He laughs a little. Ridiculous. Wonderful. He glances at the phone on the bed side table. There's a small message light blinking. A voice mail. Hannibal clicks it open, Will's voice,

"Did you come? Tell me you came. I thought about it all the way on the drive. And now I want you so badly I ache. God. I ache for you. All of you. When's the Opera weekend? It's not soon enough. Hannibal. Oh, Hannnibal. The taste of you. Your touch. That laugh you do? Your. Everything. Alright? Everything."

He plays it again. And then again. Everything.

……..

Abigail watches Sargeant Budge driving. The people at school had been very impressed when he'd arrived in his own smart dress uniform and offered to carry her school bag. He'd got the Bentley too. She'd been tempted to stick her tongue out at Katie but managed not to. When she saw Miss Bloom she was awfully glad she hadn't.

"Sargeant Budge. Can you tell Frankie the knitting snake is now as tall as me and Buster?"

"I can. I'm not sure what that is, but I guess she'll know, right?"

"I think so. She showed me how"

"Ok then. I'll tell her. You doing ok back there?"

"Yes. Will it be long when we get there?"

"We might make it back in time for their afternoon break. Then you can meet people. They'll love you just fine. Some of them don't speak English so well so you gotta be a little patient right?"

"Ok. I listen to my daddy and grandpere speak French a lot. I don't mind. Will Hannibal be there?"

"He will. You're gonna be in a meeting he's involved with. We've got you a desk and a cushion and blanket in case you need a sleep, and some crayons and paper and that kind of thing. Some books I think. Oh yeah. Sometimes people in the meeting sound cross. It's partly the language, it sounds kind of growly and angry and very abrupt. Like a screen door closing quickly on a spring. You know?"

"Slap. Slap, slap?"

"Like that, and even harder. But they won't be cross, so don't be scared"

"What if I need to go to the bathroom?"

"I've got one of the women, Theresa? She's sharing with Private Lass, she'll take you. Ok?"

"Will I see Miriam?"

“I hope so. She's in a different group. But you might, during tea”

Abigail smiles out of the window. A bit like a party in a library. Where you have to be quiet but it's interesting too.

……..

One of the Russian delegates leans over to Colonel Lecter,

“Your daughter?”

“My partner’s. He works for the FBI, they're on a case. My turn for childcare”

“she is very pretty”

“She is. She's smart too. Say hello at the next break. She's a little shy but if you like dogs, or soft toys, or drawing she'll have a very happy conversation”

“She is like my girl when she was small. I did not see her enough at that age.”

“Ah. I'm sorry for that”

“Not so unusual in our lines of work”

“Indeed. I'm making the most of being back”

The Diplomat makes a small face,

“You know they won't be too impressed about you being gay”

Hannibal smiles,

“Fortunately it won't effect anything we're doing here. And in my team it might even be described as a bonus. I'm regarded as consistent and clear. It's not something I've ever felt the need to hide”

The Russian diplomat puts his head to one side. The Colonel was Lithuanian once upon a time. So was the Diplomat’s grandmother. On his mother’s side. It's not commonly known, he leans forward again and says in Lithuanian this time,

“Make sure you don't miss out on any of it. Family is precious”

Hannibal looks at him square on and answers quietly, also in Lithuanian,

“It is. May yours be well and happy also”

…….

In the car on the way home Abigail falls asleep. When they get back Hannibal carries her inside. Remembering the conversation back in January he's not so surprised when she wakes up a little grouchy later in the evening.

“I'm hungry and tired and I feel funny”

“You do not look at all funny. I think maybe some small things to eat? Then bath and bed?”

“Cartoons would help?”

“I believe your daddy would say ‘nice try. Come and help me find something small. Maybe a grape? A baby tomato? A pea?”

“Can I have an egg? With soldiers?”

“Soldiers? Oh, buttered toast fingers. We never called them soldiers. I think maybe sailors? I'll ask Mischa”

“Is Aunty Mischa coming?”

“She might actually. We had a letter this morning. She's not quite sure. But maybe at the very end of Spring Break, you might see her when you’re back from your assorted grandparents.”

“Aren't you coming too?”

“I shall have to work for some of it. But I think I will come and see your daddy’s daddy the middle weekend?”

“And Aunty Mischa will come afterwards?”

“I hope that second week, then she'd see you before she goes back and I'll still be here a little longer”

“If you and daddy got married would you stay?”

“If your daddy and I got married today I'd still have to go back to my base. I couldn't just leave them all. It wouldn't be fair on them either. But I'm going to come back Abigail”

“Will you get married to daddy then?”

He pauses a moment,

“It's a good question. Did you ask your daddy?”

“He asked me if I'd asked you”

“Did he? That's very tricksy of your daddy”

Abigail grins,

“He's a tricksy hobbit.”

……

“Will? Come on. What you doing?”

Will turns towards Brian away from the shop window he's been idly looking in,

“What? Oh. Nothing. Just thinking”

Brian shifts beside him and looks at the various displays in the window locked at this time in the evening behind a grille.

“I think it's a good job they're closed. They're expensive.”

“Nice though.”

“Matching?”

“Maybe. We've got different styles though”

“I was joking.”

“I'm not”

Brian looks at his friend, he's never felt an especial need to get married and anyway the hell that would cause in his family! Though Jimmy might like it. Yeah. Actually Jimmy might like it. Hell or not.

“Really? Damn, Will. Really?”

“Don’t say anything. It's just sort of coming together in my mind. Shit don't hug me! They'll know something's up. Fuck! Brian! Don't cry! Oh my god!!! I haven't even said anything to Hannibal about it. I've no idea if he'd even want it. Brian!!!”

Brian almost pulls himself together. The others give them hard looks when Will practically drags them over to Bev and Jimmy and Jack at the SUV.

“It's ok. We just got a bit upset about the case. Sorry”

No one’s really buying it, but they're too tired really to call them on it either. Jack sighs again,

“Alright then. Drama over? Ok. Hotel is down the block and one across. We should leave the van outside the coroner’s office. If we can find it. The sheriff says they don't have much call for street signs. This day can't get worse. Why are there two places with the same name in Ohio? Nope. Don't tell me. Most States do. Why the fuck didn't they give us the GPS.”

……

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 55

“I don't want to change his mind, I only want to change his heart. Head stuff ain't never enough. You feel me Mason? Never”

Mason nods, his mom had gone into detail about Molson's feedback on the discussion between Dragon and his Pa, maybe him getting thinking and everything. But he understands what the Pastor means. If reason could do it Mason could give his Pa reasons, a whole great heap of them, but still they wouldn't be enough. Molson has to feel his way there, feel the word work in him, heart sore as he is.

Mason sighs. It's so hard to mend things, especially when they don't keep still, when everything is in flux in the background too. When even the centre cannot hold.

“I understand, I do, I know it. Deep inside. It took me three years to even ask. He ain't asking yet”

“Surely not. But he's listening instead of always filling the quiet”

They sit then, quiet, in one of the padded wooden pews at the back of the church. Just for a minute. A whole minute of quiet is longer than you think. Hard not to break it. Hard to break though once you have a feel for it yourself. Unless words would deepen the silence and not break it. As long as Will doesn't get broken by everything first. Spring Break is close. But then, so is Easter.

…….

Sargeant Budge hums to himself, packing the box of things they'll take to Abigail's school tomorrow. Stickers, some posters, letters from the base for adopters, some personal photographs, a few packets. All good.

There'll be a few hundred children there but Tobias has seen the Colonel mesmerise a whole tent full of stressed, pressured front line soldiers all ready to go on exercise, or on patrol, or more. He knows the Colonel will hold them all. Kind of switch on some charisma button. Hell of a thing. His guys would do anything for him. Probably the kids will too. There's a short rap on the door, the Private from Colonel Brown’s office.

“Sarge? I've got a note for your Colonel. My guy? Can't come to the formal. Sends his apologies. But your guy had better have this, I think the Colonel might check. Ok?”

“Alright then. That's most of the outcome we hoped for. Thank you Private. Job done. Everything ok? You not in bother?”

“Nahh. It's all fine. I just looked my usual slightly gormless self. Did the job, I think”

They nod at each other, their minor complicit bad behaviour done and dusted. The Private grins and ducks out of the room. Sargeant Budge looks at the envelope, its marked personal otherwise he could open it. He takes a breath and knocks on his boss’s door.

“Tobias?”

“Note for you Sir. From colonel Browns office. He's not able to attend the formal, sent his apologies and this note”

He puts it in the desk in front of Hannibal who looks at him with raised eyebrows.

“His Private dropped it off. I'll leave you to it Sir. Anything else I can do?”

Drily Hannibal says,

“Not this moment thank you Sargeant”

Tobias closes the door behind him quietly. Hannibal looks at the note, he doesn't even know Matthew’s writing, after a few considered thoughts he opens it,

>dear Hannibal,

I don't really know where to start. Except that, I accept, finally, that this is the end. Or it already was. It is isn't it? Of course I'm pissed. At the whole thing, at you a bit. At Will Graham? Maybe? For being what I'm not, I understand that. If I were more generous I'd be glad for you. At the moment I mostly envy him. I blew it. Both the past and whatever future there might have been. So I'm pissed at myself most of all.

I'll write to your parents, apologise to them. I'm sure they've worried. And I apologise for upsetting Dr Graham and his little girl. I can see now, I lost the plot about it. And I know you won't even find it flattering, just regrettable.

I suppose I'm almost grateful you let go so decisively. If it was love. Then that must have been hell. It feels like hell now. Stretching it out? The shit just piles up.

The General had me in. He's still sticking by me. I know I don't deserve it. Nor the fact you said you won't pursue the complaint or press charges. Thank you. I am grateful for that. The least I can do is fuck off frankly. I didn't say to the general, but I'll ask for a transfer. It'll be sideways. I know that. But I'll give you a clear run. He thinks you're on the way up. Good luck. I'm not going to make this more dramatic than I already am. I'm sorry. Really.

Matthew<

Hannibal puts it to one side, folded up again and back in the envelope. He’ll show it to Will at the weekend. Maybe let him arrive back first. He blows out a breath. There had been love there, of some sort. Affection left over from childhood. Some fire. Some complicated hopes tied into family connections and maybe the aspiration of appeasing something in both their sets of parents, their mothers.. Sensible of Matthew to write to his parents. Ease things there some. He sighs.

It was a kind of rootless love grafted on to other things, but unsustainable alone. He feels a momentary sadness. Recognising the truths there. And that whatever might have been with Matthew it would've been a pale thing compared to Will. Everything is Will. And maybe they will get a clear run at it. Grief is a thing with feathers. And so is love lost, or found. Love found? Hope and love? Twin bedfellows. If they should be so lucky. They should both do everything they can.

He considers a brief reply to Matthew. But sometimes that sort of thing is both unnecessary and cruel. It really should be done. Just knowing it releases a little tension he knew he was carrying. Perhaps more than he'd realised. Fraying. Freeing now.

……

"The Colonel's ex sent a note round. He was a lot happier after."

Frankie looks at Tobias, him sitting at the tiny table in the kitchen, her just finishing up their dinner on the little two ring.

"He done with the drama? Oh my God? That's just great isn't it. And for Abi? It'll be good for her too. That's fantastic. She is a darling."

Tobias smiles at her,

"Yeah, she's great" he pauses "you want that Franks?"

"What? Kids? You know it. You'd be a great dad!"

Tobias Budge nods, he suddenly feels stupidly nervous. He gets up, shakily he grabs her hand, and she laughs,

"What? What is it? Let go. Tobes!"

He drops to one knee, still holding her hand. He'd asked both the Colonel and Private Lass about the ring he'd bought. Only yesterday. He'd thought about waiting, but really, why wait? If you both know. For sure. He smiles, swallows, gets the words out,

"Marry me Frankie? Yeah? Please?"

Her mouth opens, no words spilling out, and he grins,

"hey, finally found a way to get you to shut up. If I'd only really known before!"

"Oh, my god"

"That's not a yes!"

"It is, it really is!"

Fucking hell. And that's probably more or less what both of them thinks right in that moment. He asked, fucking hell. She said yes, fucking hell!

Fucking hell!

…….

The next morning Hannibal has taken the risk of bringing a small cake and some champagne to the school. He and Private Lass had held hasty conspiratorial discussion as soon as Tobias had told them about the ring, Miriam certain that once he'd decided he wouldn't be able to wait. She'd been right.

Hannibal smiles at Tobias. The room is set up. They're just waiting for the various classes to be assembled. He'll wait until the end before saying anything. He's reasonably certain he's asked and been answered, he is carrying some excitement in the set of his shoulders and his assurance. Good.

……

“You sure there's nothing here then? Don't hold out Frederick! If I find out…”

“I know Freddie, but honestly, do you honestly, honestly think we would've been chasing around Ohio just for the hell of it? Or just to piss you off? Bad call by the coroner. Stupid call by the sheriff. Next time I guess we’ll use the GPS.”

“What was his excuse?”

"He said, ‘everyone knows which one they mean there’s is the bigger town. No one but a fool would think of the other place’.”

“Oh I bet Jack Crawford loved that! I wish I'd been there!”

“You're not wrong. He was singularly unimpressed. Even worse when we got there. Still, you can't blame them for wanting to be careful.”

“So, better to cry wolf? And get it wrong?”

“ which way round would you rather Freddie? Better to be known as the guy who got it wrong? But got it wrong for the right reasons? Or who got it wrong and for the wrong reasons?”

“Yeah. He'd hate himself later if it was the other round. So, good enough call?”

“Yes. I think so, good enough.”

“Not much for the photo page though?”

“Nothing for the photo page, except maybe the sheriff! And no further forward either.”

…….

"We’re about an hour away from Quantico. I should be home just after 11? I hope!”

“Good. Are you alright?”

“Glasses giving me a headache now!”

Hannibal hears the rest of the team laugh in the background.

“You may be adjusting to the new prescription?”

“Yeah, I know, crap isn't it. I'm sorry I missed the school thing. How did it go?”

“It went very well. Amplified by Tobias being able to tell the whole school he’d proposed to Frankie and she’d said yes. I'm not entirely sure all the children knew what that meant but there was a lot of excited cheering.”

Will relays the news to the rest of his team, there's excited cheering in the SUV too.

“That's great! Do we get them a card or something?”

“That's a very nice idea. Maybe Abigail would draw one?”

“Yeah. Excellent. Did we get any pictures of her at the housewarming? We could do a nice portrait?”

Hannibal smiles,

“Will, that sounds perfect. Very good. I know this isn't the most propitious moment, but, well, Will, we should talk about this. If it is something you would want. As I do.”

Will’s quiet at the other end, and Hannibal wonders if maybe this is too much, too soon.

“I'd like to talk about it. We’ve mostly talked round it. Because of tentacles. Maybe not this second. What with the team and all. Yeah. Shut up Jimmy. Actually, don't shut up, talk to Brian, Jeez can't I have a private conversation?"

“Will? Will?”

“ yeah. Yes. Sorry. Back again. Later on then? It's a bit complicated.”

“Because of Margot?”

“And the rest, but yes. Mainly. Not the best, well, never mind, I'll try not to throw up from anxiety”

“Oh Will, don't let it be a worry.”

“Yeah, I know. I'll be back at about? What did I say? Yeah hopefully 11. Shit. And I'll drive really carefully too”

“Thank you”

“Hannibal, it's okay, really it's okay. I know you'll talk me down from the ledge. I'll see you later. Soon. I love you.”

In the SUV no one says anything. Will does a fair amount of sighing and puffing,

“So, Tobias has moved up the whole are we even going to think about getting married thing”

Brian looks at him in the rear view mirror, but it's Jimmy who asks,

“Ready for that discussion?”

“After Margot?”

“It's not the same Will. Not remotely.”

“I know. That might be why I'm terrified”

“You want to?”

“Except for the bit where Hannibal still lives thousands of miles away and does a job where he could get killed on a daily basis?”

“Except for that?”

“Yeah. I would. I do. Except for that”

“You going to tell him that”

“I honestly don't know how”

“Don't let him think you don't want to Will. Not if you do. If it wasn't for that”

Bev reaches over and picks up his hand and squeezes it,

“Try and be less of a doozy about it. Jimmy wants to be a flower boy. I've got dibs on best woman. Though from what I've heard of Mischa she and I might fight that one out”

Will laughs, the team relax a tiny bit,

“I think we can both have one Bev. Your place is assured. Brian? Any preferences?”

“I’m just glad you're asking us"

“Honestly? I don't know what I'm doing. I'm rubbish at this”

“No you're not. You're doing great. Hannibal's great! Just be honest. A partner on the front line? Even if you're as proud as shit. It's a hell of a thing. Even though he's good at it, especially as he's good at it! It's hard!”

Will looks down at his hands knotted in his lap. It really is.

……..

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 56

Chapter Summary

NSFW at the start, Will finally got home!

Will gasps,

“Yes. Like that. Oh”

“Harder?”

“No. Just. Like this. Good for you too?”

“Perfect”

“You moved the mirror”

“I did. To see you better”

“I like it. Fuck.”

“Lean back just a little”

Will makes a small sharp noise, Hannibal buries his nose in the crook of Will’s neck, resisting the urge to leave a possessive bruise there, where it would probably be visible above the collar of a shirt. He holds Will’s waist and moves him up and down again in his lap, both of them kneeling, both of them facing the mirror Hannibal has repositioned at the end of their bed.

“I missed you”

“I missed you too”

“How much?”

Hannibal smiles against his neck, thrusts up a little more purposefully, hits Will’s prostate several times in quick succession, Will makes the tiny high noise he does when he's close to coming,

“Ok. I get it. Fuck. Face to face now, can I turn?”

“Are you sure? You like it like this”

“I like it every way, please?”

“My darling. Because I like it?”

“We both do”

They turn and Will repositions them so they can both see the mirror and each other, he sighs a long breath when Hannibal pushes in again.

“Long and slow. Please. I love this. You always feel like home Hannibal. Kiss me?”

“Always”

As they kiss Hannibal slightly leans them to one side and gets a hand around the base of Will’s cock and then strokes between where they're joined and around Wills balls. They're already tight. Will starts to pant and make thready little gasps,

“Fuck. What are you doing?”

“Shhhh”

“Oh. Ohhh. My god. Hannibal!”

Will pushes his head back, arches off the bed and comes into their joined hands,

“Fuccck. Hannibal! Please!”

He hasn't finished when Hannibal thrusts just a little firmer and slows and stutters, comes, leans his head hard against Will’s shoulder, pressing there,

“My Will”

As they still and recover their breathing Will kisses at Hannibal’s neck and inhales deeply.

“I missed how you smell”

“Yes?”

“When you go back I'm going to get you to rub yourself all over a jumper or shirt or something. So I can cuddle it.”

“You're very sweet.”

“I'm really not. Just practical. I'll probably come all over it the first week you're gone and have to wash it”

“I take it back. That's…”

“Don't lie. You like that”

“Perhaps. Yes, you're right I do. Sadly I'm not sure I could get away with it on base. But you're very distinctive”

“Good way?”

“Utterly. Though sweeter at the moment. Might be the change in diet.”

“Have you been feeding me things to make me taste different?”

“You have always tasted glorious to me”

“Yeah? Good. Can you move your arm a little so I can just lie here?”

“Better?”

“Great. I'm so glad to be home”

Hannibal considers the begun but not completed conversation, maybe this isn't the best moment to restart it. Will had sounded anxious before. And now he is happy and sated, and wonderfully cuddly, exactly as Hannibal likes. And really all kinds of things may be said in a post-orgasmic euphoria that might be considered differently later.

“In the SUV we talked about it. After we were finished?”

Ahh, so they are talking about it now.

“Yes?”

“Bev said, and I think you'll like this ‘you should marry that hot slice of Soldier already’”

Hannibal laughs,

“You're right. I do like it. And what do you think?”

“You're definitely hot”

“Will”

“Yeah. I know. Ok. Once you're back, definitely. I'm terrified. But for sure. You?”

“Both of those things, but worth it. And this isn't a proposal right now”

“I know. I expect a great performance when it is”

“Funny. It might be you?”

“That's true. That should keep you on your toes”

“I love you Will”

“Good job. I've had one pretty miserable marriage. It'd be nice to not do that again”

“I'll bear it in mind, shall I? And I think perhaps we won't tell Abigail just yet?”

“I don't really want all three of us on the edge of exploding for the next however long”

“But you do want to?”

“With you? For sure. Hot slice”

“I've changed my mind”

Will wriggles against him,

“Too late”

……..

>Dear Bedelia,

Everyone has conspired to confound and surprise me. Hannibal and Will have written. My mother has written. And you have written.

Perhaps it will surprise you too. Your letter, was perhaps, the least optimistic. Are you surprised? I find myself amazed. There have been no recriminations. There have been no criticisms. All I have found from my family are words of love and encouragement.

So perhaps, I find myself, not exactly persuaded, but something very like, well, perhaps wondering at the possibilities. Hannibal has encouraged me to come and visit before he returns to his base. That will be towards the end of March. Or even the beginning of April. Would you like that? I'm not even sure what I'm offering. But a chance perhaps, to not give up yet.

So, I'm not giving up. I hadn't thought I would say it. But there it is. Surprising isn't it? I thought I knew. But I am being taught some valuable lessons, perhaps we will learn them together.

I can't quite say yours, but I can say, not not yours,

Mischa<

……

Lynnie looks at her sister. In theory this could be her. She went on exactly one date with Tobias before deciding that dating a soldier would be a really bad idea. Well that was a mistake. She smiles at Frankie. Maybe grits her teeth a little. Hands her the mocktail she just collected from the bar,

“Well girl, it is a nice ring. Did he get you to choose?”

“No. It was a total surprise! I had no idea it was even on his mind. Maybe all the stuff with the Colonel just put him in mind of it."

“Oh? yeah?”

Frankie smiles,

“he's a really nice guy. Got this letter writing romance going through the adopt a soldier program. Really kind of sweet. Little girl started writing to him. He and the girl’s dad just fell in love.”

“Really? Will that cause trouble? What about the kid’s mom?”

“Yeah I asked that, but, she's been gone for awhile. Nasty thing, died, really sad. They've been on their own for a few years, little girl's only eight, she's a darling. I'm teaching her how to do French knitting!”

Lynnie laughs,

“Really, what? Like grandma did? That's cute. What are you going to do with the Snake?”

“Ok, so we are going to make two coiled round mats and then sew them together, leave an opening at the top, and make a long handle, and then it will be a little shoulder bag. She's got this really pretty dress, the Colonel got it for her birthday last year so I made sure the colours will work with it. We’ll get some sequins and shit, make it a bit pretty. She’ll love it. Actually I really like it already!”

Lynnie laughs, god Frankie is so practical. Actually, that's a big difference between them. Tobias probably wouldn't really suit her anyway. Sure it’s quite romantic but really, he's still a soldier. So, you know? Nuh uh.

…….

General Davies looks over the brim of his coffee cup at his wife,

“Thomas came to see me. The thing with Brown is over”

His wife looks at him and a smile spreads across her face,

“Well that's just marvellous. On multiple fronts. So. What's next?”

“Well, the formal. See if Will can front up there and hold his own with the other partners. See if Brown keeps to his side of the bargain. Thomas says he's not going to come, but we’ll see. After that, well. It's just the last few weeks of the placement. Hannibal's done an excellent job so far. One of the Russians has Lithuanian grandparents, or a grandmother. They've made some genial common cause of it. And rather surprisingly his Sargeant got engaged this week!”

“But that's splendid! Are they photogenic. Oh wait. The couple at the party? She was a lovely girl. Oh that's perfect. Are they coming to the formal? I wonder if she'd like a little hand with dressing for it?”

The General smiles, his wife does like a project, and actually that could be helpful both to the girl and to the Sargeant.

“I'll put you in touch, she might appreciate that. I expect it's her first one”

The Judge smiles.

“So, after the formal and the placement?”

“I've got some people working on a modest campaign. Graham’s boss at Quantico got their press liaison on to me. We've got a few good angles to pursue. But, they've got a big case at the moment, so I'm paying heed to that”

“Oh? What case? Not this thing up on the I-70? The Clerks were talking about it this week”

“Not about that awful TattleCrime? You really shouldn't.”

“I know. Guilty pleasure. And Freddie Lounds is remarkably on the ball. She's got some excellent material on the moth thing”

“Moth Man? Is that what she's calling him?”

“No. She's avoided that. I think it's too like the lizard thing. Mothras?”

“Mothra. Yes. Maybe. What then?”

“Just, ‘the East Coast Killer’ though ‘the I-70 killer’ would be closer to the mark it seems”

They both make a face. If this ever gets cleared up it's exactly the kind of case the Judge might hear. She's had a few serials in front of her. She hopes not though. They're always awful. Mostly for the families, but the juries suffer as well. And the court staff. Usually it's only the accused who gets a kick out of it, if they're guilty. And maybe wanted their day in court. Otherwise they quite often go down in what they might think of as a blaze of glory.

The ‘east coast killer’? she hopes he just goes down.

“Is Will actively involved?”

“From what I gathered he identified that the link was the moth”

“That's both awful and fascinating. It must be an interesting job. If bugs are your thing”

“I think they are. He made me stop him after three minutes. Got me to time him and then stop him. Very funny about it. Said he could bore on about it, like the beetles. Took me a moment to get it”

“I'm not sure I do?”

“Borers are a type of beetle”

“Oh! I see. Well. I suppose that's a sort of inside joke then?”

She smiles and her husband grins back. She's always been a quick study.

……

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 57

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hannibal? Hannibal? Are you awake? The door was open?”

Hannibal opens his eyes to see Abigail looking at him from the side of the bed. Neither he or Will are exactly dressed. Will’s head firmly tucked into Hannibal’s neck and arm thrown across his chest. His koala pose. Fast asleep.

“I am but I think daddy is asleep. Are you alright?”

“Can I bring my blanket?”

Hannibal blinks, this is probably just about manageable,

“Yes of course.”

She disappears out of the room and Hannibal looks around for his own night shirt. No sign at all. He sighs. Will really needs to sleep. He tries to move slightly but Will grumbles. Oh well. Abigail comes back and climbs onto the bed and rearranges her blanket so she can lie on the comforter and burrito herself in the blanket. She puts her head against his side so that he is neatly sandwiched between the two of them. Abigail a lighter weight, her head resting against him, the comforter scrunched in her hand under her cheek. He gently strokes her head.

“Alright?”

“Bit coldy. I sneezed.”

“Did you? How many times?”

“Three”

“Three’s a lot”

“I know. One is alright. Three is funny”

“Comfortable?”

“I'll bring a pillow next time. You're not very squidgy”

“I apologise”

“That's alright. You’re furrier than daddy”

“That's true. People are different”

“It’s ok. I don't mind. Where's your shirt?”

“That's an excellent question. I'm not sure”

“Did daddy lose his too?”

“It's possible. He's very asleep”

“Did he get back late?”

“Yes. You were already asleep. He came to check and tuck you in”

“You did that before”

“Of course. Are you going back to sleep now?”

“I think so. I just got lonely”

“Well you were sensible to come and find us then”

“The door was open”

She wriggles,

“Do you remember we said it was alright. If the door was open or everyone was asleep and you needed company or something?”

“I know. But…”

“I meant it Abigail. Any time you need one of us. Sometimes I'll know without you having to ask. But maybe not always. So it's always alright to ask.”

“Ok. Tentacles was a bit worried”

“In that case we’ll all look after Tentacles shall we?”

“Yes please.”

“Have you remembered we’re going to New York later? For the children’s opera?”

“Is that today? I forgot!”

“I think we all did. Tentacles reminded me”

“Are we staying there?”

“Private Lass found a hotel for us, but it won't be so late. We could come back”

“Can we decide later. What does daddy think?”

Hannibal is about to explain that almost certainly daddy has completely forgotten when Will rumbles,

“Daddy thinks that he doesn't care as long as he gets another hour of sleep tonight and tomorrow”

“You're awake! Hannibal let me bring my blanket!”

“Hannibal is nicer than me”

She considers this for a few moments, Will huffs a little,

“Thank you my lovely daughter for that kind support. I am mostly awake. My head still hurts. Abs did I hear you say you've got a cold? Maybe we've both got it? Does it hurt?”

“Tickley”

“I'd almost be glad to start sneezing! I wonder if you're well enough to go?”

“I think so. It's only small sneezes and my nose isn't running”

“Just walking slowly?”

She smiles, her daddy always says this at the beginning or end of colds.

“Can we go?”

“Hannibal?”

“If we want to, it’s all set up. And we can stay overnight. Unless you think Ohio is calling?”

“It better not be. Right. Abs. Not sleeping? Ok. Let's drag ourselves upright and have some breakfast. Maybe if I eat something. Oh yeah. Maybe low blood sugar.”

“Will. If it isn't better in the next day or two you must see a doctor?”

“What? Oh yeah. Sure. Really?”

“Really”

“Daddy are you ill?”

“Just a bad head Abs. Might be the new glasses. Hannibal says I smell funny!”

Abigail leans over and he ducks his head closer to her. She ruffles his hair,

“You do smell funny. Like sweeties”

He looks at her, then at Hannibal,

“Really? That is odd. Ok. Doc’s it is. I'll make an appointment on Monday. Ok both of you? Good enough? Ok Abs, down you hop. I need to find something to wear that won't shock Tentacles”

Abigail giggles,

“You haven't got a shirt either”

“I know. It's outrageous. In my own bed and everything. Can you see it?”

She hops of the bed and finds both shirts dumped on an armchair she passes them to her father and waits. He looks at her,

“Abigail? Some privacy please?”

She rolls her eyes and sidles out of the room, Will sits up and passes Hannibal his shirt.

“You handled that very well, it might not even make it back to school”

“Oh I think it might. I think the whole furry and not furry thing may be quite intriguing”

Will smiles and then grins broadly,

“It's going to be just great when she's a teenager. Thank god I won't face that alone! Pancakes?”

“Please. And I'm glad too”

Will ducks his head down and briefly kisses Hannibal, they smile at one another. Something else settling.

…….

Beau Graham picks up the letter from the post box. Stamped Ohio. Strange? It's Will’s writing. Oh. Maybe he's off on a case somewhere. The thing in the press. Nasty. So, out in the field. Which means Abigail has either been staying with that nice Molly girl and Beverly, or maybe with Will’s soldier guy. Interesting! How does he do it? It's never the easy option with Will!

>Cher Papa,

I meant to write before. I think for sure we’ll arrive Tuesday evening. If that's alright. All three of us from Thursday? And yeah. You can have a think about the room arrangements and we'll see what you came up with. I know. We can all kip in one room if that's easiest. Or put us in the trailer? How cold would that be? Hannibal is used to roughing it so he won't mind. He's looking forwards to meeting you. I know I said thank you before. But really. Thank you.

I'm in Ohio, you maybe saw the stamp. Hell of a case. I'll tell you about the bugs though, they'll make you smile. Bev says hi, so do preller. Jack is in a foul mood. We went to the wrong town, same name, wrong place. Had to come back newly 90 miles. He was so pissed.

Speaking of pissed. Yeah. Yeah. You going to come and help with Molson. Marissa seems ok actually. I've spoken to her a couple of times. Hannibal isn't coming with us. His sister is actually going to visit so that will lessen the sting a little. He has to get back Monday morning so we’ll stay until Wednesday and then drag ourselves over there.

Mason has said he'll come some of the time. The weekend at least. And his pastor is coming on the Thursday. I feel like everyone is rallying round. But I admit I'm a bit apprehensive. I've had a bit of a bad do healthwise the last week or so, headaches. Turned out to be the glasses. I realise now it's been thirty months since the last time! I know, I know. But I got a bit stressed about it. I know. I've told Hannibal, and Bev and well, pretty well anyone who’ll listen!

I've told Hannibal to bring the uniform, so we can see the guys at the VA. ok? Anything else you want? Or need? And yeah. No whiskey! Funny guy.

Proud of you pere, so proud. And grateful,

Will<

…….

The moths beat their wings against the glass of the case. Really he should try and find a bigger one. Something they can fly freer in. Maybe he could find one on-line? Craigslist or something? Or he could trawl the flea-markets and thrift stores? People are always getting rid of aquariums. And it wouldn't take much to adapt one. He's looked it up.

Really, if he had night vision goggles he'd be able to see them better. Maybe from an army surplus or something? Yeah. Maybe.

…….

“Four sneezes?”

Hannibal whispers to Will over Abigail's head.

“I know. One more set and we should probably go. It'll just annoy other people”

“There's maybe half an hour to go”

“Yeah? Ok. We might manage”

They're quiet again and Abigail sits on largely oblivious both to her sneezes and Hannibal and Will’s whispered concern. Forty minutes later there is much happy cheering and clapping. The children's matinee of the Magic Flute having proved very popular. Abigail has her favourite dress and shoes on and Tentacles and A Bientot Kitty have come along too. There'd been much discussion about whether they would need tickets, but the usher had let them in.

Once outside she sneezes again and finally notices she really does have a cold.

“My nose is running! Have you got a tissue?”

Will kneels down beside her,

“I have a whole box for you. Hannibal's gone for the car. Now. What do you want to do? We can go back home or we can go to the hotel. Either is ok”

She frowns and sneezes again, Will picks her up and puts Tentacles and A Bientot kitty into his satchel

“Just so we don't lose them in the middle of a sneeze! Ok Abs”

She nods. Blehh.

“Is Hannibal coming now?”

“He is. Just collecting the car. Someone parked it for him, so he just has to ask them to bring it back”

“Why did he give it to them?”

“”It's called valeting, so someone parks it who knows where there's a space and they look after it and then they collect it when you're finished whatever it is you're doing. It means we won't have to wait long. There. Can you see?”

He turns them both so she can see the Bentley drawing closer and Hannibal walking back from the valet's desk.

"Is it back?"

"Just over there. Ok Abs? She's now officially the worse for wear. Decision time both?"

He runs a hand over her forehead and can feel her uncertainty, the fun of a trip, the lovely lively music, special time with the three of them, or home and the comfort of dogs and toys and just homeliness and knowing where everything is.

"Would it be better if I said?"

She nods, so he smiles at her and rubs her nose with a tissue to catch a drip,

"I think you think home. And soup, and nice bread. And Winston. And maybe cartoons? And a Hannibal story. And a daddy bath?"

She sighs and rests her head on him, he looks at Hannibal who smiles back,

"Home then. And we won't spare the horses. It's a saying Abigail, no real horses involved"

Will catches himself grinning, Hannibal really is beginning to get it. Them.

On the way home they sing a little, with the player in the car, and Abigail falls asleep to Papagena and Papageno.

Will reaches across the console and briefly holds Hannibal's hand on the steering wheel.

……

During the course of the evening Abigail is nursed with soup and calpol and eventually some chestrub which Will knows is hell to get out of her nightdress. But is also very effective. When she's finally asleep she snores gently with her mouth open and he feels a pang of deep concern and love and, maybe, something shaped like hope for her. He watches her from the doorway. When Hannibal comes to stand beside him and lays an arm over his shoulders he leans a little.

So, this is what it is like to get not a second chance at life, at love, but a first. This is what it is like.

"Alright?"

"She's snoring. That's a good sign"

"In which case you must be in the peak of health and condition"

"I hate you"

Hannibal smiles against his hair and laughs and then kisses him there,

"I know. I'll make you a hot whisky and lemon. I know your head still hurts. Maybe it is a sinus cold?"

"Yeah. Probably"

Chapter End Notes

Sorry no updates for two days I've had a cold! And oh dear I seem to have given it to Abigail! It was a doozy. Still, I moaned and managed some drawing instead. That's over on tumblr. Feel free.

And the lovely @serenitynerd reccd this bit of writing for #freshmeatfriday, "a time to keep silence" was also reccd by the very generous and kind @arydishope. I know they're both reading here. Thank you so very much. That's pretty awesome if you're a writer in the Hannibal fandom.

Chapter 58

Chapter Summary

So, this chapter deals with some sad stuff all to do with Margot. Abigail isn't involved in the discussion (she's ok. She's sneezed her way through the cold and is out the other side).

If you can manage through the sadness towards the end of the chapter there's hope and the reminder of renewal and growth. I hope you'll take the journey with the team (team Sassy Science earning all the love here, of which Will and Jack are a part in this AU, Hannibal too. This Hannibal is ausome).

You may need a tissue? Or you may not. If you're about to go to sleep maybe save it for tomorrow? Or not. Maybe not.

A lot of this AU is about love. So is this chapter.

Chapter Notes

We already know Margot died. Three years ago. Still shit though.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Frankie laughs at something the Judge says. Really this is way more fun than she'd expected. Kind of nice of the General's wife to offer to come with her. This is lot more fun than prom ever was! Lynnie was way to competitive over all of that!

Judge Davies smiles,

"The caramel is good. You can dance but it's not too showy or tarty. What do you think?"

"I like it. I'm not sure I can do that kind of dancing, but I've been watching vids on you tube and practising with the mop"

The Judge laughs,

"That's perfect! You should take some pictures, show me on Saturday. You know you'll be on our table?"

Frankie blushes a little,

"Really? I mean. Tobes is just a Sargeant, don't you have other people, you know, friends to hang out with? I mean. Err"

“You're right. We should have. But at his level? Everyone wants something. So instead I get to choose. And I choose you and Tobias, and Will and Hannibal. At least there'll be people for me to talk to and to dance with. At least I hope Hannibal and Will and even your Tobias know better than to treat any of us as a mop!”

The two women, as perhaps an unlikely shopping or dinner duo as you might hope for head for the fitting rooms to change back into street clothes.

“So, coffee? After this?”

“Sounds great. Thanks. For doing all this. It's nice. My sister is a bit of a bitch about this kind of thing so, it's real kind of you”

“actually. I think it's my pleasure.”

…….

Will glances down at his watch. Jack’s just a bit late. The other three team members sit with him in Jack’s office just waiting. Just waiting. So much of their time on an active case is waiting. Or rushing around beyond exhausted.

That's how Jack looks when he eventually arrives, exhausted. Frustrated. Maybe something else there. A little something else in there. They all see it. It puts them all on alert.

“Jack? What's got you then? Not more…”

“Bev?”

“Jack?”

“Hush”

There's a stunned silence. This is unlike Jack. He's all bluster and big voices and make Jimmy squeak. Make them all squeak. But this? This is almost soft. It feels? It feels ominous.

“Really I should tell Will this first. But I know he'll just turn round and tell you straight off so I'm telling you all. Will, you're gonna be pissed with me for a few minutes for going about it this way.”

He glances down at his own watch,

“Couple more minutes ok?”

They wait a few more minutes tension in the room ebbing and flowing as they wonder. When the knock at the door comes it's an anti-climax but they're all surprised that it's Hannibal. He just comes in on Jack's word and sits next to Will who looks at him queryingly, and then back at Jack.

Jack sighs, just very occasionally he really hates his job. From the bottom of his soul, what's left of it.

“The moth case? East Coast Killer. We got a hit on an old case. One of the kids in the other lab is still trawling. They looked for pattern killers, unsolveds. I don't need to tell you. This is the shit bit.

We turned up another possible. Will, I'm very sorry. All of you."

Will turns and looks at Hannibal,

"Did Jack tell you?"

Hannibal shakes his head. Jack had just said something had come up and could he come and it wasn't great. Hannibal hasn't asked. The five of them look at Jack. Waiting for him to say it.

"There's an 80% chance that Margot was one of his victims. That period when we thought there was a lull? Maybe not. There was a pupa. It's not confirmed as to type. And. It might be accidental. But. Well. I don't want to dwell on it. But."

Brian leans forwards,

"We get it."

Will sits. He looks down at his hands. Remembers to breathe. In. Out. In. Out. He looks up again,

"I get that I'm off the case? Yeah? Who else knows? Do I need to tell Abigail?"

"No one outside this room, the B lab, and I'm going to tell Frederick. She's under Verger and not Graham, so it'd take a bit of time for anyone to make the connection."

Bev leans in,

"We're not giving this to Freddie Lounds? Are we? Please Jack, say we're not"

"We're not. We're not even going to put her on the list for now. Later we might have to. And I've talked to the boss. Will has to come off the field work and retrieval but can carry on with lab stuff. But only if you want to. The rest of you can carry on. I'm beyond sorry."

Will looks at Hannibal then, and then back at Jack,

"I don't know what I want. And yeah. I'm pissed. But I also know in five minutes I won't be. So good call Jack. In five minutes. Right now though? Hannibal come with me. I'm going to go and be sick. We'll be back. Ok? We'll be back."

He gets up and leaves Jack's office, Hannibal nods at them and a few moments later they hear shouting and then crying out in the corridor fading as Will and Hannibal go farther away.

Jack looks at the rest of his team,

"I'm sorry."

None of them have very much. Jimmy sighs a lot. Bev is making the kind of face she makes when she wants to be mad but there's no one to be mad at and Brian looks mostly numb. Jack still looks exhausted.

"Ok? Well. Not ok. Obviously. That's all I've got for you. Do you need time?"

Bev sighs,

“Yeah. Maybe. Fuck. I don't know. What does this change? Fuck it. Kind of everything and nothing. Damn. That's the worst. It was always possible it wasn't an accident. Maybe likely. But really? Is this more personal? It feels it. Somehow?”

“Because we knew her?”

“Because of Will. We knew Margot because of Will. Fuck.”

In the men's restroom Will leans over the stall. He hasn't actually been sick but he'd really like to be. Maybe throw up all of the last three years? This will be hell on Mason and his parents. Oh. Just great. His dad too? Damn.

Hannibal doesn't say anything. When Will has decided to not throw up he moves closer to him and Hannibal slowly pulls him into a close embrace. He runs a hand through the back of Will’s hair as Will clutches him, gutted by what's happened. Gutted.

“You remember I said I had no drama in my romantic life except for a maybe murdered wife? Turns out that's a pretty big thing”

Hannibal listens to the words muffled in his shoulder,

“Yes. It is”

“Nothing else?”

“Nothing else.”

“Ok. That's. That’s good actually. Thank you”

He stands a little straighter but Hannibal doesn't let go and Will slumps and then just cries. And cries.

……

In Jack's office, somewhat later, the six of them drink some of the bad machine coffee from the vending machine down the hall. If several of them have slugs from Jack’s secret stash swirling in the dregs maybe that's not so surprising.

“Ok. So do I tell Mason and ask him which of us will tell his parents. We're due there for Spring Break. Or do we need to sit on it?”

“I'd prefer you to sit on it for now. its a strong possibility. But Molson going off on one?”

They all consider this. Slowly Will nods.

“Alright then. Just us and the B team. And Frederick. Thanks you for including Hannibal Jack”

“I'm not a total shit”

“No. You're not. Best of a bad job?”

“I think that's generous”

They're all quiet again. Really where do you go from here?

Where you go is agreeing what if anything you'll say to a small child. The six of them talk for the next hour about what to say to Abigail. If anything. In the end they're reminded of what Bev said,

“So, we now think it's more likely she was killed. And maybe by this guy. How helpful is that for any of us let alone Abigail? Jack, I get it, you have to tell us. Really. I get that. But we’re not much better off than we were before are we? Margot’s still dead. The person who might or might not have killed her is probably still out there. He might or might not be this other guy? Or a hundred other guys. The pupa? Still might mean nothing. How much further on are we? We're not. Will, do you see that?”

“I see it. It's just…”

“Realer?”

“No, not that. It always felt real. It's more final somehow. And. Somehow..”

He glances at Hannibal and wonders if he can possibly get it, or understand, without Will sounding incredibly callous, Hannibal puts his head to one side, as though thinking and raises his eyebrows a little, Will nods,

“I wonder if what Will means is that ultimately if this killer is responsible it really wasn't either Abigail's fault or his, or even Margot’s. Someone else did this. Took her. And I'm sorry Will, killed her. It wasn't her. She didn't leave. And it wasn't Will or Abigail. It is a shift. Or it will be. For some people”

The team look at him. This is, well, something. And it's true. None of them ever believed it was down to Will or even Margot. And never Abigail. But children have complex beliefs about responsibility. And so do adults. Hardly surprising if they think of Margot’s parents. Of Molson’s un-pent-up anger. This changes, potentially, everything. Brian eyes Will and then Hannibal thoughtfully,

“Did this go from being the worst news ever to not the worst news ever in under an hour?”

Will looks at his friend,

“I think… I think maybe it did. For all of us.”

He reaches out a hand to Hannibal who takes it and simply holds it, between both of his. Something else, flying, free. Finally.

Hope.

…….

Chapter End Notes

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I listened to the music from Miserymono (title of season 2:13 in my headcanon) when writing this chapter as well as the Grieg from the bit where Will is fixing the boat at the start of season 3 before he sails off to Europe. All the damn feels. Oh. I made myself sad. And then, somehow, somehow, triumphant!

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 59

Chapter Notes

You made it through chapter 58?

Awesome job. You're an awesome reader....

I know. I'm a bit of a mean writer. Yeah yeah. Have a happy chapter.

Yeah.

Not really nsfw at the end cos damn these boys talk, but the teeniest bit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Daddy! Are you feeling better?”

Will swings Abigail a little as he hugs her, the rush of small children out from school like an incoming tide, all froth and bubble on the sand,

“I think I am. How about you? Cold completely gone?”

“I sneezed once!”

“That's great. So. Hannibal finished early. He's in our car, there was nowhere to park so he's circling the block ok?”

“Yes! Yes! Oooooook”

“You're in a good mood?”

“Good story and I got a ten for my math homework. And I told Katie she didn't know anything”

“Uh huh. She probably knows some things Abs.”

“Oh yes. But none of the important things! There's the car. Daddy hold my hand when we cross. It's busy here”

Will takes Abigail's hand. She's clearly much much better. And really right now, so is he. Much better. God. Has he really been carrying that shit around since Molson? Well. Actually, for all of the

last three years? They cross the road carefully and Will opens the rear door and buckles Abigail in.

“Alright?”

“Yes, yes. Hannibal, hello, hello. I'm much better. How are you. You're not at work?”

“That's right. And fortunately I finished early enough to collect both you and your father. How very lucky. Will? Plans? Abigail? Did the two of you come up with something in the five seconds it took me to circle and return?”

Will turns from where he's sat in the passenger seat and grins at her,

“What can he mean? Nope. But, we could go get the dogs and go out to our real house for the evening. Have a walk?”

“We could. Abigail? How would that be? It'd mean a bit of a drive later? Will you turn into Godzilla?”

“Can I get the other Kitty?”

Hannibal smiles at her in the rear view mirror,

“There's another? No wait. I seem to recall a whole shelf. Which one?”

“The proper one. The first one. Mommy bought her for me”

Will smiles. Maybe the feeling is contagious?

“Sounds like a plan. She could have a little time with Tentacles and the others. Ok. So. House number three for the dogs and some food for tea, and then house number one. How decadent that sounds”

“What's decadent?”

“It's when there's way too much for just one person. Don't frown Hannibal. You know I'm right really! We have three houses right now, one each. That's decadent. Especially Hannibal's house. Well. Maybe just the antler thing”

“I regret not taking that down when I had the chance”

“So many regrets huh? Bet they're not all about antlers though? Bet there's at least one to do with that armoire?”

Hannibal smiles. Really? This is..

……..

“BUSTER……BUSTER……..?”

All three of them shout together. Winston manages a few woofs. Damn, Will thinks, he should have realised something like this might happen. And it is contagious! As soon as they'd arrived Buster had taken off out of the car and headed for the field near the house.

“Ok. This isn't working. Let's go and make something to eat. Hannibal did you bring, ah, great thanks, Abigail? Find the dog bowls. Well make them something. He'll come back when he's hungry or mad that we're not still looking for him. Let's eat something, then walk and then maybe some dessert? We should have just enough light”

The three of them cook some supper in the kitchen. Substituting potato for rice when they realise they forgot it. And then adding in some frozen peas when they realise they've no other vegetables.

“I know I helped pack this. I can't believed we forgot so much stuff”

Hannibal smiles and carries on with the mushrooms. When they'd arrived back from school it had been something of a rush. Grab this. Find that. An impromptu trip. Will much easier in himself.

When Abigail is off on a hunt for more doll’s clothes Hannibal reels Will in, puts both arms round him,

“How are you now?”

“Enormously better. I can't quite explain. It's like a whole huge weight has been lifted. I didn't even know I was carrying it. It's… I don't know. What? What is it? You've got that look?”

“Oh? Which one?”

“The one where you think you've worked something out?”

“I wonder if actually what has been the matter is that you've been suffering a rather bad case of recurrent PTSD?”

“What? Since Molson? The letter?”

“You said to my mother that Jack had got you help. Did it occur to you that maybe you buried it, at some point, in order just to keep going, for Abigail's sake as well as your own? Molson's letter might have triggered some of the worst of it again. Brought it back rather fiercer? When did the headaches start? A bit before I think? Just after you wrote to them to tell them we'd met?”

Will is quiet,

“Shit. You think that's what all this has been about? Really? I haven't taken the meds for months. Oh. Right. They made me too foggy. When we. Shit”

They're both quiet, Hannibal gently nuzzling at Will’s hairline.

“It's possible. I imagine you forgot about the doctor’s appointment on Monday?”

“Ah. Yes. I did. Sorry. What with Abigail’s cold. And then. Well. Ok. I'm not the best at that”

“Let’s see how your head does the next day or two. The formal is Saturday. And then you've got a few days before you go to your father’s?”

“What do you know about the physical side of ptsd?”

“More than I'd like. I'm somewhat ashamed I didn't put it together before. If that's what it is. But the headaches? The memory problems? Even the stress scent? Could all be PTSD. I'll admit I'll be

happier if all of those things recede now. But. I think it's possible. And I think you should talk to Frederick too”

“He'll be a bit upset with me”

“Do you think? Possibly more likely concerned, and even pleased. And he'll certainly have something to say about the frankly astounding coping strategies you've come up with to get through. I won't say unscathed because of course it's taken its toll”

“Hannibal?”

“Will?”

“Wow!?”

“Yes. Wow”

…….

Later that evening back at the rental Hannibal carries Abigail in and takes her up to her room, pulling off her socks and shoes and settling her under the comforter, Tentacles and the original Kitty cuddled in her arms. She'd got ready for bed back at their own home so she wouldn't have to wake. It was a giggly happy strategy and now she's asleep. Sweetly and with only a residual snuffle.

Hannibal goes back to help Will,

“I've got the dogs in the kitchen. Anything else? I think I've got everything. Hannibal?”

“Come to the porch Will”

“Ok? Why? Sure”

At the porch Hannibal lifts him up and then carries him inside, as he'd done with Abigail, Will laughs and then says,

“Oh. Oh. I get it. We crossed another threshold didn't we?”

“Come to bed?”

“Yeah. Please”

……..

Over the next few days Will feels increasingly better. He talks to Frederick who is surprisingly upbeat,

“Well, I wish told told me you'd come off the meds, or wanted to. We could have eased them back or changed the script. One of the side effects of withdrawal is cluster headaches”

“You're kidding me?”

“I'm afraid not. I'm sorry. I didn't realise.”

“No. Don't be. I think if maybe eight of us had pooled data we might have worked it all out. I'm just amazed I'm not actually horribly ill. Although Hannibal is keen not to say that for sure just yet. And I've still got to go and see the Department guy for a sign off. Honestly. I'd feel like an idiot, except I feel so much better.”

Frederick smiles at him,

“You look a lot better Will. Almost the best I've seen you.”

He pauses,

“Actually. The best I think I've ever seen you. Jack told me about the pupa. About Margot. Is that what…?”

He trails off and Will actually grins at him,

“I suddenly knew it wasn't my fault. Or Margot's. whoever he is. He did it. Not us. Not her. Not Margot. Not me either. We're not to blame. It's. god. I don't know how to express it”

“Good though?”

“Utterly. I know I'm not totally through the woods. I do know that. But I do think there's an open clearing beyond them. It's…”

Frederick smiles,

“Not too broken Will..”

“I know. Amazing. Just. Amazing. Thanks Fred. Really. Thank you”

……..

Miriam looks at her boss, he's almost humming with something, excitement? Cheer? Happiness? Wait, he hasn't? Not him too? Really? Damn? Maybe? Maybe the Sarge knows? She hands the Colonel a file, glances at his hands just to check. Ok. Nothing there. Oh damn. He caught her.

“No Miriam. But Will got some difficult but good news and is much much happier and is feeling much less unwell. It's been very encouraging and well, good for all of us. I can't say more but when I can we’ll tell you.”

She's a bit embarrassed,

“Sorry, I mean, it's because of the Sarge and everything”

“I know. And it's quite alright. Now are you sorted for Saturday? Frankie and the Judge’s wife went on a shopping and renting dresses trip, have you done likewise?”

“She sent me photos. They're hilarious. Her and the Judge drinking bad mocktails in some tea place. They've got their heads together making bad kissy faces. I hope no reporter ever sees them! The Judge would never live it down!”

Hannibal laughs,

“Actually she might be rather pleased. She's got her own credibility to think of if the General is going up another star any time in the next few years. Supporting his folks? Won't do him or her any harm at all.”

“Oh. Yeah. But she looks like she means it. Though. I guess it can be both can't it?”

“Friendly and kind and useful? What did you say to Will? Enlightened self-interest? Maybe Frankie is alright with that too? Now you sidestepped about whether you're prepared”

She smiles, he's no fool,

“Yeah. The house went out. We're all sitting together with the junior Brits. They're totally off the wall. And one of the French guys has a thing for Theresa. So, you know. Mixed table. I've got my dress uniform. I'm gonna work the room a little in that I think.”

“Remind people you're a soldier first? Is that the idea?”

“First, second, and all, the way to Major.”

He smiles and nods,

“And beyond Miriam. Don't discount the possibility”

“Sir! Thank you”

They carry on sorting papers and speak of the meeting that afternoon. Miriam feels a little thrill go through her. Ok. So, maybe the Colonel has it in mind to keep an eye out. As she goes up? If she goes up? He could make General still? He's got maybe ten years? Five? Alright then. By the time they've finished she's humming too.

…….

Friday night quite late Hannibal puts his hand carefully over Will’s mouth,

“What? Sorry? What?”

“You were being really extraordinarily noisy”

“Really? Oh. I'm not… usually… oh? Really? Fuck!”

“Yes. Indeed. Normally I'd be enormously encouraging of it, but, maybe..”

“Don't wake the whole neighbourhood whilst having breathtaking sex?”

“I'm glad it is”

“It really is. God Hannibal. Opera weekend?”

“I know. When you come back from Spring Break. Friday evening through to Monday. Bev and Molly are having Abigail, though preller are doing something that involves a movie and possibly

popcorn on the Saturday. And I didn't even have to bribe Abigail. Miriam is taking her out Sunday."

"And if I promise to be quiet now?"

"I think more of the same"

……

Chapter End Notes

.....

You know the whole encephalitis arc thing? And everyone who said 'please no! Waaah. I know it's canon but?' Either here, or Twitter or on tumblr or in sad emails? You know what? Fuck the encephalitis arc. No encephalitis. I know. I'm a bitch. But hey. Never was gonna be encephalitis. Bite me.

(*runs away dead fast, comes back for coat cos it's raining, comes back again for iPad to write chapter 60. Chapter sixty Jo? Chapter sixty darling, runs away again*)

PTSD is a crapshoot. (In my head that means something really really bad, but you know, my grasp of Vegas vernacular is a bit poor) PTSD is double shit on toast with no eggs and no toast.

Damn, Will, amazing, bending but not broken. Awesome job. I love you.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 60

Chapter Summary

The formal, a bit of nsfw post formal, and a bit of MothMan also post formal...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will stands at the bar and orders another round of drinks for the table, frowning slightly at the little paper umbrella his drinks seem to attract. Really? Maybe he can palm it off on Frankie, or the Judge. He smiles faintly at the golden blonde woman who comes to stand beside him.

“You're Will aren't you”

He looks at her more closely, he doesn't know her? Almost certainly.

“Yeah. That's right. Graham. I'm sorry, I'm afraid I don't…”

“There's no reason you should. I'm Bedelia Du Maurier”

She sounds hesitant and as though sure this will be unwelcome news. Instead he smiles broadly at her,

“Really? That's great! Hannibal said you'd be here. Amazing. I'm really glad to meet you”

He places a hand gently on her forearm and squeezes lightly,

“You are? I'm somewhat surprised, really, I thought that..”

“What? Didn't Mischa say? I thought she might have..”

Bedelia interrupts,

“No, no, she did. It's just that. Well. I couldn't quite believe she really meant that you'd be, well, I just didn't think”

“I, well, we, are about as onboard as we can be. Honestly. I'm so pleased to meet you. God. This week. Better and better. Do you want to come and sit? People are dancing. We've got space at the table. You know Hannibal don't you?”

“A little. Not much. It was a little awkward?”

“Because of Anthony? Or Mischa? Or, wait, because of both? Ouch?”

“Yes, I think ‘ouch’ is a good summary”

“Never mind. It's passed now. Come and sit. You know Mischa is coming? Don't you? She must have said?”

Bedelia follows him back to the table smiling a little. Will is as warm and friendly as Mischa had said. Once there she's introduced to Hannibal’s Sargeant,

“Tobias? Is Frankie dancing? This is a friend of ours and Mischa’s, Bedelia Du Maurier. Bedelia this is Tobias Budge, Hannibal’s Sargeant. He came to Paris too, he's met Mischa. Private Lass is around somewhere, she was there as well. Tobias tell Bedelia about the terrible revue you saw. I can see Hannibal waving. I think I'm swopping in with him. God I hope the Judge can dance”

He leaves the two of them at the table and Bedelia blinks a little,

“Ma’am. I believe you just experienced the Dr Graham effect. When he's good, he's very very good, but when he's bad, he's…”

She looks a query,

“Horrid?”

“Nope even then he's pretty awesome. Have you met his kid yet? No? You will. She's the best. Truly. I remember stamping your invite. Such a lovely name 'Du Maurier'. How's the evening?”

She smiles,

“I think better than I imagined it could be”

……..

Will leans on the bar. How is it that he's the one who does the bar run each time? Ahh yes, to avoid the dancing. He grins to himself. He can see Hannibal dancing with Bedelia right this minute. They make a graceful smiling couple. Nice. He smiles vaguely at the man beside him at the bar. He's been doing that a fair amount too.

“Hello”

“Hey. How's it going? Having a nice evening?”

“I am. Are you Will Graham?”

“Really? Wow. Is this my terrible reputation, or terrible dancing preceding me?”

The man laughs,

“No, no, not at all. Well. Maybe. A little”

They both laugh. No one’s shoes died but it had been a close run thing. The General had laughed,

“I've no problem dancing with another man. But dammit Will decide if you're leading or following and try not to tread on both my feet at once”

Will grins,

“So, not that.. how then?”

“Your partner is dancing with my wife”

Will looks back at the floor, still Hannibal dancing with Bedelia, ahh. Oh.

“Sir Anthony?”

“Very good! No one ever gets the titles right! Spot on. You’ve cheered me up enormously. It's so dull if the first thing you say is a correction. Cheers!”

He raises his glass and Will wonders if this might be a bit of British facetiousness, but he seems sincere,

“The other good thing is that you're very pretty.”

Will snorts, Anthony grins,

“It's true! Now. I promised not to be a jerk about it. But, would you like to dance?”

“Willing to risk the shoes and toes?”

“Oh I think so. Leading or following?”

“Sir Anthony, I'm happy to follow. And only on the dance floor”

“Drat. You've heard the ‘not that kind of party’ line haven't you?”

Will smiles,

“I have. Three times I'm afraid. But it's a good line. And. I think our esteemed partners have spotted us. Ready to risk a, what is this?”

“Rhumba. I know it. Just hold tight and follow closely. Yes, yes. I say that to all the boys and girls”

Will smiles,

“I'm sure you do”

……

Laughing at something he's said Miriam is swung round by one of the British group,

“I can see our chap dancing with that fellow you know?”

“Yeah? Oh. Dr Graham. He's great. Got an eight year old who is the sweetest thing. I love her”

“He seems friendly. How come he's here?”

“Partner of my Colonel. They're a brilliant couple. One of those ones you kinda hope you'll grow up to be. If that's your thing”

The British guy smiles.

“Is it your thing?”

She smiles back, he's got uniforms bad,

“Maybe”

……..

“You were dancing with Anthony!”

“Yes I was. He's alright. He can dance ok too”

“So I saw”

“Shut up Hannibal”

Hannibal opens and closes his mouth, he does that a lot with Will. Especially when Will is in sass mode. Which is increasing. Thank god.

……..

“God. My feet are killing me! I've never danced this much. Whose drink is this? Is this mine? Why’s there an umbrella in it? Dr Graham? Isn't this your umbrella?”

“Frankie. It's yours. I beg you”

“Oh. Ok. I can stick it in my hair. How's that look?”

“Surprisingly good”

“I used to like you Dr Graham”

“Damn Frankie, please, I beg you, call me Will. And keep the umbrella! The barman has it in for me”

“I think he likes you”

“Really? Oh. That's not the be mean to the person you like thing is it? I always thought that was a bit twisted”

“It's what they say about little boys and little girls”

“I know! Look where that got me! I'm all for nice. Now. Dance? We can be bad together?”

“I like you again now.”

“So fickle Frankie”

“Yes indeed, Will. That's a bit weird. Dr Graham? No that's weird too. Let's just dance. Don't tread on my toes”

“Damn. Sorry!”

…….

“How was that? Were they nice about it all?”

Bedelia looks at her husband,

“Yes. I admit I am surprised by how friendly.”

“Will Graham is a bit of a dish”

She smiles at his turn of phrase,

“And Hannibal is enjoying a hearty meal?”

“I'd say so. You might have looked very good together but he comes alive with Will”

They both turn from their seats at their own table to where Hannibal is standing behind a seated Will one hand resting on his shoulder, at their table, talking to the General and Judge Davies. Anthony carries on,

“He does, doesn't he. So there's a thing. You and Mischa then?”

“I've no idea Anthony. I'm sorry. But I will tell you”

“Darling! I know, and whatever happens we've had a damn good run. Now. Hannibal told me Colonel Brown isn't here after all. Have a look round. Anyone you think might be a likely candidate?”

“Oh Anthony. You are incorrigible”

He smirks,

“I know. Good isn't it. Don't say a thing. Just blink if you agree”

…….

“How much did you drink Tobes?”

“One glass. At the beginning of the evening. I'm good to drive”

“Alright then. Just asking. I stopped counting at six umbrellas”

“I thought you didn't like cocktails?”

“They were Will’s. He kept trying to hide them”

“Oooh. Will is it now? I'll keep an eye on that shall I?”

“Honestly! I’ve never met a guy more gay for their partner!”

“Apart from the umbrellas? They look cute in your hair Franks”

“You gonna help with that later?”

He laughs, a little giddy on the good evening, and on love,

“Of course!”

……

“Thank god you decided on a hotel”

“I thought it wise. How many umbrellas?”

“Eight? Maybe? I don't know. I gave them to Frankie”

“I saw.”

“Oooh. Colonel Dances like Wolves Lecter! That sounds a teeny bit jealous!”

“You danced with Bedelia, Anthony, Frankie, twice, the Judge, Miriam, some French diplomat, Miriam's room mate Theresa, the General even! And not me!”

“Yeah?”

“I did notice”

“Saving it for now wasn't I?”

“Oh”

“Yeah. Oh. I'd just have been too handsy”

“Oh?”

“For sure. You gonna help me with this really difficult to undo bow tie? And these links? Man these studs are tricky? I definitely need help with them”

“Will”

“I thought maybe some naked dancing? How does that sound?”

“We might manage that”

“Maybe a little something in the shower too?”

“We might manage that also”

“I did remember the lube. Maybe some dancing and a little fingering?”

“You'd like that?”

“Shower first. A little encouragement there”

He grins,

“A little low level light, a little music, a lot of naked?”

“I think we definitely could manage that. Are you still feeling better?”

“Awesome. Despite the eight umbrellas. Clothes? Bathroom? It's a pretty good shower”

“I asked when I booked”

“Really? Oh. Poor man’s waterfall? Fuck”

“Yes?”

“Please”

“Think of it as a practice for the Opera weekend”

“Trust me. I'm counting the days.”

He pauses and Hannibal looks at him with a small smile on his face,

“What's caught your fancy? You're thinking,”

“What? Oh. Being slightly damp, naked, dancing here with you, you slowly opening me”

“Perhaps we should do that then?”

“Did I ever tell you what was in your valentine’s parcel?”

“You didn't. I imagine it's chasing me back here still?”

“Oh. Maybe. Perhaps I'll wait and see if it turns up. Don't want to spoil the surprise?”

Hannibal kisses him then, slow, deep, intensely, Will tastes of eight umbrella drinks. Sweet. And anything but simple. Glorious.

“I never can entirely predict you. Shower?”

“Waterfall? I could stand to get a little wetter”

“God, Will”

“I love you Hannibal”

……

Miriam lies in her bed. The British guy beside her is fast asleep. He's been sweet and attentive and just the right side of adoring for her. Not too much. Just. Pretty damn good. She grins. It's been a while. But, yeah. She breathes out, in, just lets herself feel. Not everything is rough at the edges. Soothed.

…….

In Ohio, once again the Sheriff gets a call. Damn. Surely not. He can't get them back. That big Agent’ll kill him. Another false alarm? He listens intently. His heart sinks a little. Maybe the other was a copy cat? A bad one too? Bad in the sense of not very good. As well as awful. But this? This sounds like the original deal.

“Where? Who else is there? Ok. Don't touch anything else I'm on my way”

He ends the call. Looks at his cell for a few minutes. He goes and gets dressed, his wife mumbling in her sleep, used to the occasional disturbance. Only occasional but enough for her not to wake. As he walks slowly down stairs he thinks about the call. Damn. Better to cry wolf for the right reasons? That's what that reporter said. Aww. Fuck it.

“Agent Crawford? Man. I am real sorry about this. But, this time. And I ain't seen it yet, but you know. A heads up? I think this time we got one. Of his. I really think so”

At his end Jack sighs, and on a weekend too.

Chapter End Notes

This weekend it's the #bothofus challenge... I invite you to take a look! I've got art, knit, and fic in the game... with some awesome collaborators! Actually look for the collaborators they're amazing! Here and on tumblr once we can work out how to post stuff..

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 61

Chapter Summary

Post formal recovery time!

“Hannibal? I'm going to make some coffee, do you want some? I can bring you some water as well.”

“Will? Coffee? That would be very kind”

Will sits on the side of the bed, next to Hannibal, he runs a hand through his hair. Fine and soft with silver and gold glints.

“You ok?”

Hannibal sighs,

“I will admit to having had a moment of sadness at the thought that we are now five weeks through our eight week sojourn”

“Yeah. I know. I'm trying really hard not to think about it at all and, at the same time think about how to manage when you're gone back to base”

Hannibal doesn't reply,

“The Judge spoke a bit about it last night, when I wasn't treading on her toes”

“Yes?”

Will smiles and runs a thumb across Hannibals cheek, Hannibal chases it with his mouth, attempting a kiss,

“The General's working to something possibly as short as a three month timetable. He says the business with Matthew has helped. He's put in for a transfer apparently. Oh. Wait you knew that. You told me that. It'll come through in about three months. Ironically it could mean that his post is up for grabs, General Davies is speaking to General, I don't know his name, wait, Marlon?”

“Marlow”

“Yeah? Ok. Marlow. But that would mean a sideways shift. The Judge said it might be better to wait. For a promotion?”

Hannibal doesn't reply, and Will smiles at him,

“I'm going to go get that coffee, do you want me to order some breakfast too? I think we'll have to get going in about ninety minutes or so?”

Hannibal pulls one of Will's pillows over his head and mumbles something,

"I didn't hear that, but I'm guessing it's not great. Is your head that bad"

"I believe I may be pouting. Or sulking. One of those"

"Well that's just a shame. I'll bring back coffee and water, I'll order some breakfast, then I'll come and be very, very nice to you"

"How nice?"

"Ninety minutes minus breakfast and a shower worth of nice?"

"I may recover enough for that"

Will leans down and quickly kisses him,

"Back in a tick"

Out in the main part of the suite Hannibal hears Will make a breakfast order over the phone, he hears and then smells coffee being made, and he hears Will putter around, he hears a short volley of swearing,

"Will?"

Will comes into the bedroom,

"Ok. So it doesn't effect us immediately. But there's another body. Bev and Preller have gone already, so's Jack. I don't have to. Of course. But there'll be stuff at the lab probably tomorrow. I thinks Jack's forgotten I'm off from Tuesday. I'll have to call him. In a bit though."

"And Abigail?"

"Molly's got her until we collect her. That's straightforward. God. Bev's text says she got called just after four this morning. Jack apparently was like a zombie. Oh. Wow. It's the same Sheriff in Ohio. Oh shit. That's not great."

"Will? How are you?"

"What? Me? Oh, well. Ok I think. One thing at a time. I'm still enjoying it not being my fault. Some other guy's fault? Well. I'll get my head round that in a bit. Probably about a week after we catch the guy. You know? Delayed something or other?"

"Will?"

"It's ok. I know it will probably hit me unexpectedly. I also know we might miss him, or not catch him, or not catch him for ages. But you know? In lots of ways nothing will make it better. It can't be fixed. I think I maybe got the bit I needed, which was to no longer feel responsible. Ok. That's the door I'll bring breakfast. Don't go anywhere."

Hannibal smiles,

"Where would I go Will?"

……

“Don't even talk to me”

“I wasn't going to Bev”

“Nor you Brian”

“Fine by me”

“Why? Just. Why?”

“Because he hates us, and everybody really. Not just us. In fact not us at all. Just some random hate filled some kind of shit”

“I wish Will was here”

“We all wish Will was here. He'd be excited about the bugs. But it's good he's not”

“Yeah. I know. I'd miss you too you know”

“You would”

“I'm just grumpy”

Jimmy grumbles,

“No shit Bev”

“Shuddup”

“No you”

“You”

“Guys! I beg you. Let's play a game or something. There's another twenty minutes until the guy gets here. We've got coffee, it's not pissing with rain. We're ok. Ok? So let's play, I dunno, what happened at the formal? We can text Will and see how close we were?”

Bev brightens up a bit,

“Yeah? Ok? Can I text him the questions? Are we gonna do them one at a time?”

“Why not? What time is it?”

“Just before nine? Is that too early?”

“He’ll just ignore them if they are. Alright question one?”

“Errr. Did Colonel Brown turn up?”

“I vote no. Really Jims? You think yes? Bev?”

“I'm with Jimmy. Yes”

“Ok. Bev text him that. Explain we're having a quiz, or he'll think we're even noisier than usual”

“Ok. Question 2? Jims, your turn?”

“Alright.. how many people did Will dance with?”

“Six! No eight!”

“Really? Wow, I'd have said one, just Hannibal, but maybe more than once”

“I'm going with twelve. I think he'll have drunk too much and got all giddy and hysterical and danced with everyone who asked, and some who didn't!”

All three of them laugh. They come up with ten more questions,

“We can't ask him that!”

“We can ask. He doesn't have to say!”

“Oh. Yeah. Ok. Hang on…. Ok done”

“You really sent that? Shit. I was joking!”

“Fuck! Brian!”

She looks down at her phone. Shame you can't call a text back. Oops.

…….

As they eat breakfast Will hears his cell buzz.

“Ooh, its Bev. Oh. That's kind of funny. They're killing time. With a quiz. About the formal.. oh that's good?”

“Oh yes?”

“Did Matthew come? That's easy. Sent. How many people did I dance with? I think we've established you know that one.. really eight? Ok. Sent. Oh yeah, Frankie twice. She was worse than me I think. She'd practised with a mop following some guy on YouTube. She's very sweet. Ok. Also eight. Sent. Also eight. Sent. No. Sent. Also no. Sent. Yes. Sent. Very funny. Sent. Just now. Sent. Totally. Sent. Hmmm. Nosey bastards. Sent.”

“Nosey bastards?”

“It'll just embarrass you. I said ‘nosey bastards’ that was the answer I sent. Don't do that look. I've deleted the question. You'll just. No really I did. Noooo. Not my fault. I deleted it!!!!”

There's a certain amount of scuffling before Hannibal establishes Will did delete the question and did indeed reply ‘nosey bastards’. He returns to mild pouting.

“Are you going to be awful for the last three weeks?”

“I'm sorry that some of that time you'll be away. We've so few days."

“Yeah, yeah. Spring Break, but you'll be with us Thursday night to Monday, and then you'll have Mischa towards the middle of next week, and we’ll go to the Vergers for the weekend, I know. We have to. And then be back Tuesday. Then Friday and it's the Opera weekend. Look, I've been practising a salacious wink! Good isn't it?”

“Very good”

“Oh love. I know. It's truly crap. But we have to manage somehow. And frankly I'm gearing up for Molson right now. Even a few days with him might kill me. Let alone almost a week. Got to be done though, for Abi. And for them really.”

“You're right. I'm sorry. I'll have the pleasure of Mischa’s company and you won't”

“Marissa is alright. And Mason is coming for the weekend too. And Reba and Dragon Thursday. Dad said he'd come some of the time.. I think after Mason goes? And we're going to the church on Sunday?”

“I know. I know. It's just that…”

“I know. Let's look forwards to the Opera weekend and then what? A few days to get everything sorted and you off? Mason and Dragon are coming after you've gone, to help us move back? We can take stuff back to Baltimore too? Hey! Hey. Don't be so upset! Hannibal! Shit”

“Forgive me. I usually enjoy my work very much. I simply don't want to go. And I cannot for the life of me think of a way to ensure I stay.”

“This is the control freak thing isn't it?”

“Perhaps. Yes. Alright. Probably”

“Rubbish isn't it? Abigail cried last week”

“Oh Will. You didn't say”

“Too many others things. She didn't want me to tell you. I told her I tell you pretty well everything. She knew it. Maybe she wanted me to tell you?”

“I'd like to go back to bed now please and hide under a pillow. Possibly the General won't think to look here”

“Yeah? I think I'll join you. We've got fifteen minutes before we better get ourselves sorted. Fifteen minutes! What do you reckon?”

“Good, come and sulk with me”

…….

“Molson? I'm gonna come just after Will if that's alright with you and Marissa?”

“Beau? Sure. When do you think?”

“You got Mason staying until Monday?”

“Sunday evening”

“I'd be glad to see him. Mind if I come some time Sunday?”

“Come to church if you like. Meet us there, we could carry on after?”

“Ok then. How's the church thing going?”

“Alright. Odd bunch of people. But honest. The Pastor is ok. She's got me looking out for some guy. A bit traumatised by stuff. Ornery.”

“Like you?”

“Funny guy. Nah. He don't cuss any. And he's one of them introverted types an all?”

“Bit like Will?”

“Sure. Quiet.... Beau?”

“Molson?”

“I said some shit”

Beau waits,

“To Will”

He waits some more,

“Think he'll hold it against me?”

“He's bringing Abigail isn't he?”

“Yeah. He is”

“Has he said anything about the letter to you?”

“Not directly as such. He told you?”

“He did”

“Ok then. Beau? I apologise. Alright?”

Beau is quiet a moment, well heck!

“Thank you.”

“I'll say it to Will too. I was wrong minded and cruel. No need for that”

“He'll appreciate it”

“Don't know about the Soldier guy. You going to meet him?”

“He's coming up Thursday through Monday. I want to meet him. Mason has. He likes him”

“I know. Ok. Thanks”

“Molson. Really? You've had it worse than me. Way worse. I can't even imagine. But Will? It's nearly killed him. For Abigail and for himself. Not just when she died. You know that?”

Molson is quiet then,

“I do. I'm not real proud of myself right now. Ok.”

He sighs,

“See you week after Beau”

“Alright then. Give my best to Marissa”

……..

Simonetta looks down at her diary,

“Is it today? Darling? Mischa? Is she coming today?”

“Not next Sunday? When's she going to see Hannibal?”

“Ten days or so. Maybe it's next Sunday! God my memory!”

“I think next weekend. Have you got anything for lunch in case she does show?”

“Not a thing. Oh. Wait some bulgar wheat. At least I think it is. It was in the back of a cupboard.”

“Did you clear out the kitchen too?”

“I did. I feel rather proud of myself. Did you know we have eight sets of egg cups?”

“Eight? I can't even recall using one for at least a year. Don't we ever eat boiled eggs?”

“Only in egg mayonnaise. Three of the sets are silver. Shall we sell them?”

“Offer them to Hannibal and Mischa and then sell them when they say no”

“When? Not if?”

“Silver egg cups?”

“You're quite right. I'll make a list she can take with her when she sees them. There might be something they'd like for Abigail.”

“Ahh. Now that's a good idea. Though it's possible Will will hate us if we export all our clutter to him”

“As long as there are no antlers! When's he seeing his father and in-laws?”

“It must be soon. Hannibal's only got three and a bit weeks left hasn't he?”

“Yes. Almost four I think. Well. Probably they're thinking of it as only just three. Poor things”

“Yes. Indeed. I've been thinking of it”

“Awful for both of them. Differently”

“Yes. Differently. But still awful. Is that the front door? Damn. You don't think we've got the wrong week do you?”

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 62

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Molly pushes the last of Abigail's things into her small rucksack.

“Ok Abs? I think we've got everything. Bit of lunch?”

Abigail nods, still intent on the French knitting Frankie got her started on. She and Bev had gone out the previous day and bought three new balls of yarn. It's a very long Snake now.

“Yes please. When are daddy and Hannibal coming?”

“Early afternoon. Probably not long after we've eaten. That ok with you?”

Abigail nods again.

“Molly? Can I ask you something?”

Molly looks at her, sitting there, swinging her legs on the chair. Little socks, little legs. So different to Wally when he was that age. And kinda the same too.

“You can ask. Same rules as your dad ok? I'll tell you unless it's private or I promised, ok?”

“You and Wally’s dad used to be married. That's right isn't it?”

“Sure. That's right.”

“Will you and Bev get married?”

Molly smiles. They've pretty well all talked about the fact that Abigail is quietly obsessing about the whole marriage thing. Actually, Abigail is probably only expressing what everyone else is thinking.

“We've talked about it a bit. Maybe. Not yet though”

“Not yet? Why not yet?”

“Bev's sister is getting married. Don't want to steal her thunder”

“What does that mean?”

“Sometimes when you know a friend is doing something you decide to put off doing the same thing so that it doesn't distract people from your friend. Weddings can be like that”

“If daddy and Hannibal get married will they have a wedding?”

Molly smiles again,

“Usually. The wedding is the thing to celebrate someone getting married. Then, hopefully, they stay married to each other. So, probably, like a party, to celebrate the start of being married”

“Where would they have a wedding”

Oh wow, she's really got her teeth into it,

“Where are Tentacles and A Bientot Kittty getting married? Where’s their wedding going to be?”

“Maybe at home?”

“I guess your dad might get married at home too. You just need a special licence.”

“Shall I tell him? He might not know?”

“Abs? Honestly? Your mommy and Daddy got married. City Hall, before you though. He does know. And I think if and when your daddy and Hannibal decide to get married they'll tell you. They won't keep it a secret. They'll almost certainly want to wait a bit. Until Hannibal gets posted back here.”

“Why does he have to go back?”

“It's his job. You know it was really lucky he got eight weeks here don't you?”

Abigail nods,

“Miss Bloom tried to tell me. I was a bit upset”

“Uh huh? Well. I understand that. I'd be pissed if Wally had to go away for a long while. Or Bev. Even you. Maybe.”

Abigail giggles,

“He does love us though. He is going to come back”

She sounds mildly defiant. Bastards, thinks Molly, almost certainly someone at school being a shit.

“Yeah. He is. He definitely loves you Abs. I've seen the suit for Tentacles.”

“It's nice isn't it?”

Molly thinks of the green and blue suit. Nice isn't quite the word, but it's close enough.

“It's truly amazing. It goes with your dress too doesn't it?”

“Yes! I'm going to be a flower girl!”

Molly smiles at her, God, everyone is lining up to be a flower girl or boy at someone's wedding.

“Yeah? You'll be great. No sneezing though”

“I'm not ‘llergic”

“No? Good job then”

……

“She's still asking about weddings”

Will sighs, smiles a little ruefully at Molly,

“She's worse than me then. I'm only thinking about it.”

“You going to tell her that?”

“I don't know. Fred says it'd probably make her feel more secure, but I'm a bit scared that if anything happens it will make things way worse.”

“Do you mean when Hannibal goes back?”

Will nods,

“I know. Before you say it. I am as bad as her. I keep thinking what if he doesn't come back. Or can't?”

“Why? Because it's a front line position? Shit, Will! Hundreds of families go through this all the time?”

“I know, I know. It's just that right now it's us. And damn. I've only just let myself stop worrying about one thing!”

“Yeah. About that?”

“What Moll?”

“Good. Well, not good. But not bad?”

Will nods,

“Thanks. Bev called you today?”

“Uh huh. Bad job. Local woman by the look of it. They found next of kin. Nasty.”

“I-70?”

“Off this time. Changes the scope Bev said”

Will sighs,

“Sure. Yeah. And with Margot? Yeah. Harder to catch too. He's escalating. It's. Well. You know”

They both ponder a moment, Molly changes the subject,

“Ok. I'm going to make tea. You want some? You think Hannibal's alright with Abs and Lily?”

“Almost certainly. He's so great with her”

“You wait until she's a teenager. She'll have him wrapped round her little finger”

Will smiles,

“I know. It's great”

They both grin. God. Teenagers.

…….

“Get in the SUV Jimmy, we all need to sleep”

Jimmy grumbles, but does as Brian asks,

“I am just a heaped pile of fed up”

“I get it. Bev? Come on. Bev? Stop talking to Molly or Will or whoever. Please. I'm dying here. Well. Not actually dying”

Bev makes a face at Brian as she gets into the SUV.

“It was Hannibal actually”

The two men look at her, Brian in the rear view mirror,

“Really? He ok? Is Will..”

“He's fine. And Will, by the sound of it is now sass master supreme”

Brian laughs,

“Anything in particular or is he still riding high on the ‘it's really not my fault thing’?”

“That plus the success of the formal I think. Hannibal says it went very well. Good for him. Good for the range of guests. Good for the General”

Jimmy sighs,

“Will it make a difference? If everything goes well”

“Hannibal said that the Judge is talking about three months.”

“Three months? That's not too terrible. Is it?”

Brian makes a face,

“You'd miss me if I wasn't around for three months”

Jimmy looks at him,

“You know. I probably would. You'd better not get yourself seconded or something. No extravagant consulting or guest lecturing”

“Sure about that?”

“Which bit? The missing you? Or the don't go off somewhere? Both actually”

Bev watches the two of them from the back of the SUV. God these two. How she loves them. Brian a little quieter, calmer, focussed, even a little intense at times. Jimmy? An utterly adorable princess. And damn good at his job. Both of them really. She sees Brian smile, he catches her eye a moment in the rear view mirror. She smiles at him. Oh. Is that a wink? Funny guy. Wait, right now? Wow! She almost holds her breath.

“Jim? Coat pocket. My coat pocket, not yours, idiot.”

Jimmy laughs and then reaches into Brian's pocket and pulls out a small paper bag, something squishy inside,

“God this better not be rude Bri, Katz will have a field day, and not the ‘in the grass good evidence’ kind”

“Yeah. I know. Open it Jims. You're safe”

Jimmy pulls a small velvet bag out of the paper. It fits in half his palm. He weighs it a moment and then tilts it up into his other hand.

A single plain gold ring.

“You can choose the other one”

Jimmy looks at the ring, at Brian, he turns to look at Bev in the back seat and shows her the ring, then sharply back at Brian,

“You complete and utter bastard.”

“That's a yes then. Isn't it?”

“What about your mom? Fuck. What about your dad? What about… well fuck me sideways”

“Still a yes?”

Jimmy doesn't say anything, Bev hands him a tissue,

“I hate you both. Did you know about this Bev?”

Beverly doesn't say anything.

“Damn. Does Will know too?”

Neither Brian or Bev say anything, Jimmy gulps,

“Of course it's a yes. And I fucking hate you totally”

Brian smiles. Good. Not too much drama then.

“And if this was to ensure I wouldn't have a screaming fit and throw things, well, just wait until we're home. I know. I know. I won't wreck the motel”

Brian smiles, ahh good. Just the right amount of drama.

“I love you Jimmy Price”

Bev leans on the window and looks out at the passing landscape. Not everything is hell. And this has only taken what? Five years? Six? And if Jimmy wants a matching ring? Well, she knows where the shop is.

……

Mischa hums. The drive back to Brussels isn't so awful. And really the afternoon with her parents had been quite enjoyable. Even if they'd had to hide the fact that really they weren't expecting her.

She makes a stop en route. Stretches her legs. Just over a week now. Hannibal and Will, lovely Abigail. And Bedelia. She allows herself a moment of longing. And love. And possibly a faint tingle of lust. Yes yes. She's not immune either. Though they're always so decorous about it. All long lithe limbs and intensity. She shakes herself a little. Oh. Bedelia.

……

“Alright? Abs? Five minutes. Hannibal? You're so late! What are you doing? Hurry up?”

“I know, I know. Thank you.”

Hannibal sits and drinks the coffee Will has made him. Abigail stares at him,

“You're really really late? We have to go to school. We'll have to leave you behind”

“I know. I simply couldn't make myself get out of bed. I was too comfortable”

“But you have to!”

“I know. Here I am. Coffee and a croissant and I'll be out of the door. You too”

Will comes back into the kitchen,

“Oh my god! You're both terrible! Why am I the early riser in this family? Oh! Because I'm the one who actually does get up when the alarm goes. And not because I want to either…”

He pauses, neither Abigail or Hannibal look remotely repentant.

“Yeah well. Just for that, I'm not going to tell you the really fun bit of news Brian texted me this morning. Nope. Not unless you're in the car in three minutes Abigail, and not unless you’ve eaten that croissant and drunk that coffee by the time we’re out of the door, and don't whine Hannibal”

Abigail hops down from the table, rushes off to brush her teeth and then grab her bag and coat, Hannibal grumbles,

“What did Brian text you?”

Will checks to make sure Abigail is on her way out of the door,

“He proposed to Jimmy en route to the crap motel they were staying in last night”

“With Bev there?”

“Yup! To stop Jimmy having a conniption fit! Worked as well. He only had minor hysterics apparently”

“Did you know?”

“I knew he was thinking of it.”

“It is in the air”

Will leans over and kisses him,

“I love you, and yes it is. Abs gets to be flower girl. It might distract her a little. Molly says she talked about it. A lot.”

“Will, do you think we should speak to her about it?”

“Not yet. Maybe just before you go back? Ok. I gotta run. Did I just say it? I love you?”

“You did. But you can't say it enough. I love you too Will”

Chapter End Notes

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Part two of AAS now planned. Twenty Chapters. Provisionally titled as 'Adopt a Soldier AU: Four Weddings and a Funeral.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 63

Cassie looks at the envelopes in the in-tray,

“Dr Graham, did you miss these? They've been here a week or so?”

“For me? Damn. I didn't see them”

“Well. Not exactly. But I think so?”

She hands him the three letters. They're all stamped Washington or Baltimore but he doesn't know the writing. He opens the oldest one, and reads through it, then the second, and then the third,

“Well, that's odd. I’m no wiser. Cassie, take a look”

He hands the three letters over and she scans them too,

“That is odd. Is this about you? Nothing to do with the case is it?”

“The moths? Shit. Wait? What's the date of the first one?”

They look at the post mark,

“What does it say? I can't tell. Is that before or after Freddie Lound’s article?”

Cassie grabs a tablet from the lab bench, looks up TattleCrime’s web page,

“Oh. No. Before. So maybe not to do with the case. Actually..”

She pauses and looks a little embarrassed,

“What Cassie? What is it? This isn't to do with the, well, you know, the other thing is it?”

“Dr Katz talked to me. She warned me off. Yeah I know. I should have listened”

Will smiles at her carefully,

“It's ok. We're well past that now. What did she say?”

“She made some comment about the stalker you'd got. I didn't know what she meant. I thought she was being harsh.”

“I don't know what she meant either. Oh. Wait. Not that spate of letters? But that wasn't me specifically. That was all of us”

“I don't remember”

“Garrett found them, or he got sent them, but Jack decided it was aimed at our team not theirs. It got misdirected in the mail room. I think he's still got them. Hang on. I'll go and look”

“Isn't his desk locked?”

“Jack’s? Sure. But I can pick it. Oh Cassie, don't look so shocked! It's a skill. Come on I'll teach you”

They spend ten minutes opening Jack's desk, when they've finished Will rifles through one of the drawers until he finds the letters. There's not much in the drawer apart from the small bundle. Just Jack's secret stash and a couple of glasses and Jack’s spare gun in a lock box and a coupe of rounds of ammunition.

“He knows we open it all the time. It's why there's nothing in here really. Ok. Let's have a look”

He re-locks the drawer and they take the letters out into the lab.

“Ok. Nine of them. They don't mention me by name do they?”

“No. But you're the only one who wears glasses, or has dark curly hair.”

“Brian kind of does”

“Not really. I do think this is you”

Will sighs,

“Well that's just great. How far back is the first one? Ok. Nine months. That's what? End of last summer. I can't even remember what we were working on at the time.”

“I'd only just joined the lab”

“Yeah. Jack might have been worried about scaring you off.”

“From an FBI crime lab? I'm not that feeble”

“Good job too. Ok. We better put them all in sleeves. It's probably too late for most of them. I should have thought before we opened all three of them. Damn. Sorry”

Cassie shrugs, easy to be wise after the event. Always.

……

Hannibal knocks on the door of the General’s office. In theory they have a quick catch up every day. But in practice that's fallen somewhat by the wayside. Three times a week if they're lucky.

Sargeant Hobbs lets him in and then knocks in the inner door, he's back only moments later and ushers Hannibal in, the General cuts to it quickly, as is his wont.

“Hannibal, good. The thing on Saturday? Every one’s very pleased. The VP is delighted with the photographs and his wife is very pleased with how she got to dance with the guy from the EU, and from NATO, and several other vips. Apparently she said you dance like a dream and what a shame we'd lost you to the other side.”

Hannibal smiles slightly,

“I'm glad it'll reflect well on you Sir”

“Of course you are. So. My wife says she spoke to Will. He fill you in? Brown leaving? His post will be available? I can't help but think you'd be smart to wait. But I'd understand if you didn't”

“How much longer might it be?”

“Buddish says he's got something maybe four to five months. Six at the outside.”

Hannibal pauses,

“Promotion? Or ladder?”

“Ladder, but promotion, almost for sure. Within two years.”

“And Colonel Brown’s job?”

“Harder to say. Might mean re-deployment before another step”

“I see. Sir, I'd like to speak with Will about it, before I decide”

The General nods, he'd expected nothing less,

“Very well. I hope you'll decide in the next ten days. Either way we’ll need to get things moving before you go back. Anything to report to me?”

“One of the French delegation went off with one of the Middle East lobby, after the formal. It may be nothing”

“Or it may be something. Very 007 of you. Or whoever our guy is. Thank you Colonel. That's all”

……

Reba stretches out her feet in front of her, imagines what she'd see, if she could. Five colours on her toe nails. One of the teenagers had done it yesterday, after service. Loving that the Pastor had just sat there drinking coffee, laughing with people, as she let her feet be painted like little rainbows.

“It's a good look on you”

“You think?”

“Carefree. Human. It makes you approachable”

“Well, god forbid I'd put people off Dragon!”

Her friend smiles,

“I think it's all ok. Numbers are up. Lots of people hung around yesterday”

“The healing power of cake”

Dragon smiles at her, the warmth carries in his voice,

“Molson and Marissa Verger both came. He told me he apologised to Beau Graham. He's got it in mind to do the same with Will Graham”

“And is he willing to meet with Will’s guy? Not yet huh?”

“You knew before I said?”

Reba nods, some things you don't have to be able to see to be able to see.

“He will be. We've got time. He's got time. I know Mason’s worrying. But I'm confident”

“In your persuasive powers?”

“Mine? Oh no. Not mine. In the good news. He's going to learn to love his neighbour as himself.”

“That's the problem right there isn't it? He doesn't love himself one bit”

“He doesn't. That's the truth. You working on that?”

“Sure thing Pastor. We could all do with a little of that”

Reba nods, puts out a hand and pats his hand when he offers his.

…….

Jack listens intently to the person at the other end of his cell. Bev watches him out the corner of her eye. God. He's frowning. Please let there not be another one so soon. Jack turns and catches her eye and beckons her, he covers the mouthpiece of the cell with his hand,

“I've got Will on the line. There’ve been some more of those letters”

Bev blanks on it for a moment,

“What? Letters? What? Oh. Really? The stalker? From last year?”

“Uh huh. Turns out there have been three letters this year too. One each month. More or less. First one before the moth man, I know, I know, we said we wouldn't call him that. Anyway. Will says they look like the ones from last year. This makes nine all told”

“I didn't know you kept them?”

“Sure. Possible threat to the team? Any team? Not on my watch”

“What's Will saying?”

Jack hands her the cell,

“Will? What's with the new letters. You making friends in all the wrong places again? Who found them?”

She listens to him,

“Will, say this quiet if she's still there, but definitely not Cassie?”

She listens again,

“Alright. But you get why I'd ask. Ok. So, threatening or just all round peculiar? You told security there? What did the post room say?”

Jack watches her nod, he smiles slightly at Jimmy and Brian as they join him,

“More stalker type letters. Bev is just talking to Will. Not the case. Or we don't think so.”

“Something to do with Will though? Isn't that what we thought last year?”

“Hard to pin down. He's sending the whole lot to documents. He says there're no prints he can see. Or fluids”

“Well, whoever it is is just too considerate. Creepy or scarey?”

They both turn and look at Bev waiting for her to finish the call. She glances at them, finishes off what she is saying and then hands the cell back to Jack.

“He's gonna scan them and send them, the whole lot. We should talk about them. It's not good whatever it is. He started adding little hearts at the end”

“Ok. That's kinds more like an obsessed teenager than a …”

Bev interrupts,

“That's what I said, but apparently they're little organic hearts. Not cute ones. Yeah. ‘Oh’. We're gonna have to track this down. I know some people think stalkers are kind of flattering. But Will sure won't.”

Brian makes a face,

“Oh yeah. And Hannibal is going to just be wild about this isn't he?”

“He's going back in three weeks' time? Just over? We better get to it. I can't imagine he’ll be at all happy at having to leave his little puppy all alone with some guy's interest all piqued and shit”

The four of them consider just how pissed Hannibal might be, Jimmy grins,

“Don't tell me I'm the only one thinking what Hannibal might be like if he loses his temper. We were all there with that business with Cassie’s brother”

“Oh, when, Nick isn't it? Made Will’s nose bleed. Yeah. Valentine's Day and everything. He wasn't impressed was he?”

…….

Hannibal pushes into the house, thank goodness it's not too late for once. It's quiet, but there's a good chance that Abigail has only got as far as a bath. Oh. How nice. Flowers. That's very sweet. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

“Will? Are you upstairs?”

There's a voice from the bathroom, Hannibal takes the stairs two at a time,

“I'm just in time then? Story?”

Abigail squeaks,

“Hannibal story! Hannibal story! Can I? Please”

Will finishes drying her hair,

“I think so. Hey. How was your day then?”

“Good thank you. What about you?”

“Good. Odd. Mostly good. Hey. Thank you for the flowers”

“The flowers? I thought they were from you”

Will pauses in what he's doing and switches to French,

“Alright, we'll need to talk about this. This is part of the odd from today. Let's get Abs to bed first”

He switches back to English,

“Well, wherever they're from they are very pretty. What do you think Abs? Lovely flowers?”

“I like the blue”

“Yeah? Me too. Right then, jim-jams and story. Hannibal, I'll put something on for you. Ten minutes?”

“Thank you. Maybe a glass of something too? I know you won't”

Will scrunches up his nose, and makes a hand gesture that suggests an inch of something in the bottom of a glass, Hannibal raises his eyebrows,

“Really?”

Will thinks of the letters, the flowers, that he and Abigail are leaving for his father's tomorrow. That Hannibal will leave in just a few weeks. And that he, or the team, but probably him have some kind of fan. Maybe worse than a fan. Maybe a stalker.

A little later, after much story, Hannibal joins him in the kitchen,

“So. The flowers?”

“We got some odd letters last year. The team? At work? And then it turns out we've had some this year. They only just showed up. This is the first time there's been something else though”

They look at the flowers,

“Did they come here or to work?”

“I like your thinking. Work fortunately. Not here. Damn. We'll have to check at home. The other home. You know what I mean.”

“I do. Have you spoken to Jack?”

“I have. I've scanned them all. Sent them to the team. The originals have gone to documentary analysis”

Hannibal nods, he takes another mouthful of the sausage stew Will had made,

“The stew is good. Thank you. Bulgar wheat?”

“Yes. Bit of mint”

“You know I'm not happy about this. What other steps is Jack going to take?”

“Well, it might be good timing that we’ll be away for nearly two weeks. Maybe it'll get sorted?”

Hannibal says nothing, chases at the last few mouthfuls around the plate. Considering.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 64

"Daddy? Hannibal is going to come on Thursday to grandpere isn't he?"

“He is yes, why? Did you think he wouldn't?”

“Just checking. The flowers said he'd miss you”

“Abs?”

She smiles at Tentacles. She can't take her favourite doll into class but later on they'll be driving to her grandfather’s and everything is ready in the car for Will to collect her straight after school and the beginning of spring break. Including Tentacles. Though they're saving the trouser suit for the wedding.

“We did flower language at school. With Miss Bloom. Don't you remember?”

Will tracks back in his mind. Something? Around Valentine's Day? He'd thought she'd send coded letters or pictures to Hannibal, slowly he says,

“What do the flowers say Abs?”

“That they miss you, and look after yourself. They're Zinnias and Azaleas. They're so pretty.”

“They are. Good to know Abs. Very well remembered”

She giggles. Flowers are lovely. Maybe she can get some for her grandpere on the drive there? He'd huff and puff and be pleased. And say things in French in a gruff voice. She squiggles in her seat. Her grandpere always smells of machine oil and wood chips and coal tar soap. And lets her take things apart.

……

“Sir? Something bothering you?”

“Sargeant?”

“Sir?”

Tobias looks at Miriam, the Colonel has looked distracted since they started this theoretically short briefing. Hannibal blows out a long breath,

“There's a small problem at the lab. Possibly an over enthusiastic fan. They've sent a few letters, but someone sent Will flowers yesterday”

Miriam and Tobias both blink, oh wow, the Colonel won't like this one little bit. Tobias is pretty sure he could throw a real tantrum if he was thwarted in any way in relation to the Grahams, for all that he's generally pretty cool about everything. Everything, except them. He thinks about what he'd do if someone sent stuff to Frankie. Yeah. Not good. Miriam asks,

“What kind Sir, just a bunch from a seven-eleven? Or a real bunch, from a florists?”

Hannibal looks at her,

“A florists. Of course they're following up on the delivery. There wasn't a card but it has to be signed for, at the lab, so there's a record.”

“Ok. That's good then. Isn't it? Maybe not someone trying to hide their tracks? What kind of flowers?”

“Miriam?”

“Flower language. Maybe they mean something?”

Both the men look at her,

“I know. When Beth died we spent ages working out what wreaths and shit meant. Just in case the driver sent something, you know, anonymously, as a sort of apology.”

Hannibal manages,

“I'm sorry Miriam. That's awful for you”

“It's ok. It was good distraction at the time. We were all so mad. There was a local florist who was totally kind. He knew all about everything really. I spent a lot of time with him. He was kind of a grief counsellor in a way. Helped me see I wouldn't get through it, just kind of past it for starters. Might get through it later.”

Hannibal thinks of Will. Getting past Margot. Getting through it now.

“Miriam. What can we do for you?”

“For me? Sir? I'm ok. Still, you know… I'm ok. Really…”

They all pause,

“The flowers sir?”

“Oh. Yes. I took a photo”

He fishes out his cell and finds the image and shows both Tobias and Miriam.

“Oh. Ok. Nothing too threatening. Just ‘I hope you're looking after yourself’ and maybe something like ‘I wish that we were friends’, or I miss your friendship’ something like that”

He nods, something, better than nothing for sure,

“I'm no wiser. Hardly surprising though. Thank you Miriam, I'll let Will know. Agent Crawford too. Will is off to his father's today. I hope this will be resolved quickly. Though with all their efforts focussed on the I-70 killer I'm not hopeful. But this will help I'm sure. Thank you both. Now. Back to today. Miriam? The Russian delegate?”

“Sir”

……..
>My dear Mischa,

This is just the hastiest of notes. Anthony has to go to Canada for two weeks. And despite all evidence to the contrary he is not an unkind man, so he has suggested you might like to stay here. I realise you might prefer to be with Hannibal and Will. But if you would like to? For at least some of the time?

I remain yours, and am counting the days,

Bedelia<

……

“Hannibal? Are you alright? The message sounded urgent?”

Hannibal breathes a sigh of relief into his cell,

“Will. Good. The flowers. Are you tracking the florist? And have you thought of what the flowers mean?”

“Ahh love. Way ahead of you. Abigail actually. She did language of flowers at school a month or so ago.”

“Oh”

“I know. And yeah. We are following up on the florists. Can you believe six people had flowers delivered here yesterday? Six? Amazing. One of the guys in the post room has hay fever he's all over it apparently. Doesn't want them to accept deliveries. Says it's a biological hazard”

“Certainly a hazard”

Will laughs,

“I know it's not funny really. But, well. Zinnias? Really?”

“Will”

Will sighs then,

“I'm taking it seriously Hannibal. Though it might be the lab as a whole and not just me. I've asked Jack if I can show you the letters when you come up. Not the originals obviously. Oh. Hang on, Anal Docs, sorry, that's what we call Documentary Analysis, have pinged an email over. Cassie? Cassie, come and look at this!”

“Will?”

“Right. Sorry. Well, it's kind of extraordinary really, if you put all nine together in order, in a square, you can see an image in the words. The guy must have used a photo and written round it. It's clever.”

“Who is the image of?”

“Well. I think it's Bev and me. Maybe Brian in the background. Could be Jimmy. Look, I can't send you it. But I definitely think this is a team thing. Not me specifically”

“Alright. But keep me updated. I'm still not happy Will”

“You and me both. What is this? Not a peep for years and then suddenly, yeah, sorry Cassie, really, it’s fine”

“Will?”

“Sorry. I was trying to make a joke. Badly. Cassie is being very tolerant”

“Will?”

“Hang on. Cassie, I'll just take this in the corridor.”

Hannibal hears the doors of the lab swing open and closed,

“Sorry. Sorry. We're trying to help her integrate better, and helping on this seems like a good idea. Help her see another side of the work”

Hannibal pauses, really he has no need to be in any way jealous,

“I'm not being entirely rational about this. I realise that your job comes with some attendant risks. I simply hadn't anticipated this one”

“Ok. Crazy serial killers and moths? Just an everyday thing? Flower sending admirers? Not so much?”

“I did say it wasn't rational”

“You did. Hannibal? Only you? Ok? And I'm still on board with the whole possessive thing, ok? Totally. And I know it's worse because of the three week thing. Oh and by the way I'm going to keep saying three weeks until the day before you go because otherwise…”

“My dearest”

“You better believe it. The one and only? Alright?”

“I'm sorry. Local insurgents are one thing. Something that threatens you or Abigail? A different thing entirely”

Quietly Will says,

“I get it Hannibal. I really do. And I know I deflect. But I do understand. And I know we're a bit vulnerable. I'll talk to Jack. He wanted to know if I wanted protection. I don't think so, yet. But I will think about it. Cassie is phoning florists right now. Just in case it's either a very dozey stalker, or a very innocent fan who has no idea what they're doing”

“Thank you”

…….

“Abigail my little darling girl! Did you bring those flowers for me? You're such a good girl”

Abigail hugs her grandpere tightly. Ooooh. Her grandpere. She clutches Tentacles in one hand and a small bunch of daisies in the other.

“Will? My boy? I'm so glad to see you”

Will steps close to his father, and for the first time in a long while they hug. Will maybe sobs a little. If his pere does too? Well, not hardly surprising. Abigail puts her arms round both sets of legs, so she can hug them both.

They ease back a little,

“I've stuff in the car shall I bring it in?”

“I'll give you a hand. I'm putting you and Hannibal in the trailer. Abs can have the living room put-you-up. Alright?”

“Works for me. Abs. You alright with that? Living room? Hannibal and I will be in the trailer. Right through the door. Not far at all?”

She looks at her father, looks at the trailer, close to the back door of the house. Just a camping shell really. But kind of small and cosy. She's slept there a few times.

“Can you sleep inside the next two nights?”

“Until Hannibal comes? I guess so. Pere?”

“Sure thing. You feeling worried little girly?”

Abigail shrugs a little,

“Not really. Just. Maybe.”

Will and his father exchange looks, ok, what's this then? Will crouches down beside her,

“Abigail, what's the matter curly girlie?”

She puts her arms round his neck and buries her head there and mutters something,

“Ok. I' didn't quite get that? Abs? Say again?”

“I don't want you to be on your own.”

He smiles at her,

“Oh poppet. It's ok. We can call it practice? It's ok. Really. But I'll stay with you tonight. It's kind of you to think of me. But you really don't need to worry. I'm good. Honestly”

He looks up at his pere, who smiles back at him, a little sad maybe, at the edges, ahh his boy. It won't be so easy. Or it might not be. His little girl, she's a wise child. Too soon to have to be, but she is.

…….

Hannibal dries up a plate and stacks it on the drier, beside the ones left over from breakfast. He looks at the flowers. Neither he or Will had wanted to put them out on the compost heap, it would have worried Abigail. They're pretty for sure. He considers whether to do so now. It's a little late. And ‘I miss you’, and 'take care of yourself’, are both sentiments he can get behind.

The house is quiet. The dogs have gone with Will and Abigail. Hannibal trails quietly round the house, a little tidying. He puts back one or two books. Returns two Kitties to Abigail's bedroom. Hangs up some of the laundry in his and Will’s room. Makes the bed, knowing he'll unmake it within the next hour or so. Sits down on the edge of the bed, picks up Will’s pillow, smelling faintly of him and his shampoo and soap. Hannibal sighs into it. Thinks about the joke they'd shared about Will jerking off over some shirt of Hannibal's when he's gone back to his base.

He sighs, puts back the pillow. And feels Will’s absence keenly.

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Will laughs,

“No, really, its fine. She's asleep now. Pere is making some awful tea thing. We've fixed up the trailer but I'll stay indoors until you get here. How are you getting on?”

“I have tidied every single thing that can be tidied, I have emailed Mischa, and my parents. I never email them. I have written to Murasaki too. I have written up notes from today. I have composted the flowers. I am running out of things to do”

“You composted the flowers? Ok. Good job, I think. Cassie found a chain of flower shops, whoever it was paid cash but they've got cctv. So, some poor tech guy is looking it over.”

“And Jack?”

“They're all back tomorrow. He says they'll get on it. Honestly, I'm less worried than I was. I think it's some over keen fan or something.”

Hannibal takes a sip of wine from the glass he's been holding loosely. He mustn't have another. Half a bottle has gone surprisingly quickly.

“Hannibal?”

“I'm sorry. I suppose I'm getting used to worrying about someone. It's…”

“But you’ve be been in relationships before. Not Matthew. Before then? That Italian guy?”

“In Bosnia? Well. Yes. But, that was very different. And clearly without a future”

“Sure. I understand that. But the whole thing about the other person being simply absent, and you wondering or worrying about what they were doing. What you should be doing. What should you be doing? You're not mooning around are you?”

Hannibal takes another sip,

“It's possible”

“Oh Hannibal. I can tell you all about worrying about the other person. Ok. So what are you worried about right now? Go on, just tell me?”

“That you will be unduly influenced by your in-laws and change your mind”

He's quiet then. That came our rather stronger than he'd expected. He can hear Will hold the cell phone tighter to his face, closer to the little microphone in the handset, he can hear him breathe out, then in again,

“That isn't going to happen. It simply isn't. I know you've had the whole commitment thing blow up in your face. And more than once. But that isn't me. I'm not like that. I don't know how to be. I was with Margot for years, even though she didn't really want to be with me, or anyone really, I was utterly loyal and devoted and caring. I don't do desertion. I can't. I won't. I know it's hard for you

too. And this stalker fan thing? Even if there is someone who's decided they're interested. I'm not. At all. Shall I say it again Hannibal?"

Hannibal pauses, disliking his own neediness but recognising the necessity of honesty between them,

"Please"

"Only you Hannibal. Only you. Always"

"Thank you"

"You're welcome. And have you stopped pouting?"

"Very good"

"Damn. You haven't have you? Ok. If I can't convince you… I can't. I wish we could.."

"What?"

Will pauses, he really can't say what just crossed his mind,

"No. Nothing. I'm being irresponsible and stupid"

"My parents eloped"

Will can hear the smile in Hannibal's voice, he smiles himself, just a little,

"Are you some kind of mindreader?"

"Possibly. Were you thinking it?"

"Yeah. Damn"

"Will"

"We really shouldn't."

"Will"

"Fuck. Alright. I'll think about it. Not this week though"

Hannibal laughs,

"Are we now in the realms of discussing how to be spontaneous?"

"Planned spontaneity? I think so. God Hannibal. I do love you, very much. Ok?"

"And I believe you Will. Thank you. I feel reassured"

"Ok. Good. And I was actually thinking about it. There I've said it! And I can hear my dad grumbling. I have to go. Try and sleep, ok?"

"You are Quite terrible, and I adore you beyond words"

“Good job Colonel. Hannibal, really. Everything, ok? We’ll all see you Thursday”

……..

“Is he alright Will?”

“Thanks. Is this tea?”

“Camomile. Helps me sleep. Tastes like grass cuttings but, well, it's good too”

Will grins, his dad used to use half a bottle of bourbon to get off to sleep, if this is the alternative? Well. He can show a little filial solidarity.

“He's fine. A little fed up. And the flower business has him on edge”

“Yes? Well, there's a part of me that's simply glad he cares that much”

Will smiles round his cup, rubs it along the edge of his mouth,

“Don't think I don't appreciate it for one minute. Because I do. Pere, Hannibal, me, we've talked about the possibility of getting married. How would you be with that?”

Beau rubs his chin a little,

“It won't be easy? Will he adopt Abigail formally?”

“Ahh. That's a good question. We haven't actually talked about that. I think he'd probably want to but I've no idea what Molson would have to say about it. Actually I think I do. That isn't going to go so well.”

“He apologised to me”

Will puts his cup down carefully,

“Molson did?”

“Yeah. I wasn't going to say. He wants to talk to you himself. But yeah. He apologised”

Will looks at his father in astonishment,

“I don't think I'm quite ready for that? Really? Apologised?”

“Yup. Completely. He was sincere and he sounded quite ashamed of his behaviour. Recent and in the past”

“I'm still amazed. Is this Mason? Or the church, or what?”

Beau shrugs,

“I don't know. He sounded like he'd done some hard thinking, maybe schooled himself a little. Or someone had words to him which hit home”

“That's great. I'm still not sure about how he'd take it with Hannibal though. Whether or not we wanted him to adopt Abs. I don't know what she'd want either. God. I hadn't really thought of it”

“But you have now. So. Do you want that?”

“If she does. If he does. What about you? Yeah? It would mean if anything happened to me she'd be looked after. No, pere, don't get me wrong, I know you would. It's just that she'd still have a daddy. If she was little.”

Beau smiles,

“She would. She likes him a lot. I'm looking forwards to seeing them together”

“Pere? This means the world to me? You know that don't you? You do. It's. Well. Like having a complete family again?”

“Again Will? My boy. It's like having it properly, for the first time. You know if I like him at all I'm going to coddle him rotten”

Will smiles,

“I think he'd enjoy being welcomed and looked after quite a bit pere. He's missed out on some of that. Army and everything.”

Wills father smiles, he never really got the chance to dote on his only son’s partner. Maybe this would be an opportunity to make up for some never before chances?

……..

Hannibal looks at the package and envelopes on his desk. One of them is in Will’s handwriting. Marked ‘private’ and underlined three times. Oh! Maybe the Valentine's parcel? He checks the post marks. Ahh yes, it's followed him and clearly sat in clearing somewhere in the Middle East for a while. It hasn't been opened though.

He carefully puts it aside into his briefcase, smiling a little. Better not to open it here. Will has skirted round some of its contents. And there is the February quotation in there too.. which must mean the March one is due soon? Yes, before the end of the week or so.

Hannibal smiles. These small things to look forwards to. He tries not to think about the Opera weekend. It will distract him for at least half an hour if he allows himself to indulge in that piece of reveille.

He stretches. The meeting this afternoon will be short. He faintly thinks about going swimming. Or perhaps… the conversation from the previous evening is still percolating. Would Will really consider it? Hannibal pulls his tablet closer to him. No harm in checking what the requirements are?

……

“Simonetta? Have you looked at email? There's one from Hannibal”

Simonetta looks up from her coffee,

“Yes? Is he alright?”

“Shall I read it to you?”

She nods, and he scans ahead a little,

“Alright, so, the usual greetings,

>so, all is well here. And thank you for the offer of the eggcups. Though we're still puzzling that one out, Abigail was rather excited at the prospect of a proper silver one (for Tentacles and A Bientot Kitty too I'm afraid, if you're willing, though that takes us to three and three more would mean Will and I had one too). She enjoys boiled eggs with what I'm insisting on calling sailors and not soldiers. She giggles defiantly each time. So like her father.

Will is well, he has taken Abigail to see his father, I shall join them later this week and stay a few days en famille. Mischa will arrive next week and I am glad for it, I'll admit because otherwise I would worry at Will and Abigail being with his in-laws. And yes, without me. We have yet to get you all in the same room. I shall look forwards to it. I am trying not to be frustrated or even angry about it. It would only upset Abigail and make things even harder for Will. So instead I am fuming at you a little. I am almost sorry for it.

In other news? It transpires that Matthew may have done me a favour after all. He's being transferred, at his request, and his post will be vacant. There's a chance I could step into it. Though it might dampen down promotion prospects. Papa? Do you have an opinion? I'd be grateful to have some quasi-objective view. The alternative is a post in about five to six months time but with better promotion prospects. I'm finding it something of a challenge to decide and Will is being too accommodating.

And so to you? Mama? Are you still on the clearing out jag? I'm forbidden to accept anything. But Abigail got quite excited about what she called ‘everything very very old’ which I'm sorry to say is anything older than her father. Apparently I am not immune from this characterisation, she has promised to fetch me things when I need a cane. I plan on reminding her.

I suppose I am minded to ask why? Not some awful trembling of mortality? I jest, but really? Simply to release some capital? To make things easier for us all to visit? (If so, I thank you. Reynard the Great Fox gave me nightmares as a child. I might never recover. Though Abigail, of course, thought he might simply need wings to be a dragon fox? No, I'm not sure either.)

She of course sends love. And is still trying out different names for you both. I'm not sure if I should keep you apprised of these or not? Do let me know. I'm attaching a picture we took at the children’s Opera event. A huge success apart from our sneezed accompaniment.

I should stop. I mean to write to Murasaki tonight, and to email Mischa, just to tie up all the loose ends about her visit. I'm wondering if you might be persuaded to come? Once I'm back properly. There are some things we should talk about, and better face to face I think.

I am, your loving son,

Hannibal<

The Count looks up at Simonetta,

“He sounds incredibly happy”

She smiles, perhaps a small glint of moisture in her eyes,

“Better than he ever has. And more relaxed with us too. We should encourage him to email more. He's always looser in his formality when he does”

“I like his letters though. And he has more time for those when he's on base”

“Yes. I suppose. In that case I am just enjoying him as he is right now”

The Count beams at her,

“Will is very good for him. What do you think he wants to talk about my darling?”

“What do I think? Or what do I hope?”

“Either?”

…….

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 66

Chapter Notes

Two thirds folks.....

Two thirds.....

Thank you for reading.... you're awesome! To have come so far....

"It's good of him to do this Will”

“I'm pretty sure he's totally fine with it you know”

Will and his father watch as Hannibal and Abigail talk with one of the older and more distressed Vets at the local VA drop in centre. Beau had originally settled near here just for a little support, connect with some of the guys, share memories. And a drop or two. There's three of them egging each other on at AA now. Competitive even here. He smiles sat the thought.

“Yeah? Jesse can be a mean sumbitch though”

“I'm sure he can. Doesn’t mean Hannibal can't handle it though. Actually he’ll do more than handle it. The guy will feel good after. And even I can see that Tentacles is a winner.”

The two Graham men smile, watching Abigail bounce Tentacles on Jesse’s knee, laughing with her. Hannibal glances up at Beau and Will and smiles a little more. Beau grins back, shifts himself off the table he's leaning against and goes over to join the two of them.

Will leans back a little further against the table. This is ok. And his dad has lived up to everything he said. God, this turned round more than 180 degrees. And there's some kind of cook out they're staying for. What it is to have a partner who mostly just shrugs and adapts to whatever new thing that turns up. It helps that Hannibal is both quite extroverted and despite his own insecurities mostly optimistic. It helps a lot.

Hannibal joins him at the table, leans against it too,

“Well he's an interesting man. Did two tours. Sounds like he had a rough time of it. Back home almost more than out there. Didn't serve with your father though?”

“No. Close though. But no. They didn't know each other until here. Pere thinks Jesse could go either way right now. More down than usual. Some family thing.”

They look at each other, recognising the complexities of loyalty to the family, service to your country, and when the political narratives shift and what had once seemed heroic now simply seems ill-judged and regrettable.

“And is he taking the help that's offered?”

“As much as they’ve got. It's not much here. But they try. And the guys don't get much stick out on the street. Those that are still wearing it.”

Hannibal nods. There are far too many ex service men and women now out on the streets, homeless, leather or rubber tramps. Hoboing across the US. Following whatever work they can. Or their friends. Or more generous locals.

“We can never do enough”

Will nods. His own feelings complicated by his own painful childhood. But he can see the truth in it. Finally some of it unraveling for him, his father, all of them.

“Pere is doing much better. And he likes you. He said if he did he'd possibly be a bit over the top about it. He always wanted that. For me to bring home some sweetheart he could make a fuss of. Hey, look at me, coming good! When I brought Margot back they both bristled instantly. I thought it was because Pere didn't like her. We talked about it last night. I got that wrong from the start. He thought that really she didn't like me, let alone love me. She did. But in a narrow kind of way. Just, well, it wasn't nearly enough as far as he was concerned.”

“Complicated then”

“Yeah. Totally. But we straightened some of that out. Finally. He thinks you've got it about right.”

Hannibal smiles,

“I'd say he was underestimating me”

“I know. We’ll let him find that out shall we? Ok, I'm gonna rescue Jesse now, he's sending me desperate looks which might be to do with Tentacles or Abigail, or probably both of them!”

Hannibal watches Will join his father and daughter and the vet. It's Beau though who peels off. Hannibal has perhaps been anticipating this, Beau smiles at him a little,

“Alright then”

“Sir”

“Oh wow. Ok. You're fine with me. ‘Sir’ is it. Damn. Someone taught you right’

“My Mama will be glad to hear you say so”

“Yeah? When they coming over then? I'd like that”

Hannibal blinks,

“I imagine as soon as I'm posted back we'll make arrangements. They'd be pleased to meet you too.”

“Good job. Do the whole in-law thing. We’ll have got Molson sorted by then. I know they're not exactly family now, but they are for Abigail, so, well, you get it huh?”

Hannibal nods,

“I do. We’ll find some kind of accommodation. Eventually. I'm sure”

“Not fighting it?”

“I'm sure you know all the many different ways we can fight an offensive”

Beau nods, many different ways,

“You going to adopt Abigail?”

“If it's what she and Will want. I'd be privileged”

“Good. That's what I hoped you'd say. You told him that?”

“Not yet. Should I?”

“Yeah. And her, I'd say. But you're right, Will first. What would your parents say?”

“My father in particular would be delighted. It means the title won't be lost.”

“The title? Yeah, Will said something about that. He wasn’t joking then?”

“He wasn't. And inheritable through make or female lines. And adoptive or biological isn't relevant.”

“Really?”

“Really. It means she'll be Countess one day”

Beau snorts,

“She's already a princess. You going to tell her that as well.”

“Perhaps when we visit Europe next”

Beau shakes his head a little,

“Will they recognise it if you get married?”

“Not currently. Though Will can use the title, as an honorific. It'd be recognised here.”

Beau laughs out loud at this. Will and Abigail look up at the him and Hannibal, some surprise in their faces, Beau holds up a hand, allaying any worry,

“Count Doctor Graham? Are you shittin’ me?”

Hannibal smiles,

“My father has to die first”

“God yeah. Sorry.”

“Not at all. I find it amusing too. In Europe the old families are so common that it's barely a thing. My mother has her own titles and so forth, in her own right. From her own family. Abigail will inherit those too”

Beau looks at him then,

“You really mean all this don't you?”

Hannibal looks at him in some surprise,

“Of course Beau. Did you doubt it? The whole richer and poorer thing, in sickness and in health, and I'm sure Will has told you about the terrible furniture.”

“Yeah. He has, you're not wrong”

“I didn't think so. And I think they've finally released Jesse. Abigail? Our friend looks somewhat overwhelmed by Tentacles. Everything alright?”

…….. …

In a florists in Baltimore a young man asks about a bunch of flowers, in the end he opts for a small bowl of camellias which he pays for in cash. The florist takes a note of the address for delivery and then is careful to direct the man towards some flowers directly under their sole working cctv camera.

The man is friendly, personable, cheery. The florist tries hard to think of a way to get at least his name, but the offer of the mailing list, even with a promised 20% discount cuts no ice. There's nothing she can do except try very hard to remember everything she can about him. She's on the phone as soon as he's out of the door. When she puts the handset of the landline down she notes that her hand is trembling slightly.

…….

In his small bedroom Roland lies on the top of his bed covers, the curtains drawn, and some blackout material pinned round the edges to stop any chinks of light getting through. He's wearing his new night vision goggles. He'd found them on an online web store and despite some misgivings about the security and how much of a con it might be he'd borrowed his mom’s credit card and bought them. He'd asked first. More or less. And paid her back the money.

It had cost him most of his meagre savings but as he looks around his room the faint heat signature of his ticking light bulb, his bedside clock, the tanks all show up. The moths in particular in the UV light look incredible. So, overall, worth the expense. And his teacher says he can bring it for the science fair, if he wants. As if. Science fair? He doesn't think so. Anything could happen there. And no one would care if it did. So, thanks, but no thanks.

……

“The Valentine's parcel arrived”

“Really? Did you bring it with you?”

“I thought it might be better to save it for the Opera weekend? Was that a mistake?”

Will scrunches up his face, he leans up on one elbow, looks down at Hannibal lying with his head pillowed on one arm, smiling,

“You're probably right. I can hardly remember what was in it now”

“I'm not entirely sure I believe you”

Will grins,

“Yeah, alright. Caught”

“We both have particular patterns”

“Of course we do. Hard not to. How's it been so far?”

“I like your father, and that seems to be mutual. He's been very kind”

Will grins,

“He thinks I finally got it right”

“He knows I think I did”

“Good to know. What was he laughing about? At the VA?”

Hannibal thinks back,

“I'd explained what Abigail would inherit, title-wise, if you're willing for me to adopt her formally”

“Shit! He got you on that? God he only talked to me about it yesterday!”

“It's not unsurprising. I've already spoken with the family solicitor”

Will pulls back a little. The trailer is small but there's enough room and enough light for him to get a decent view,

“Really? What does that entail? Or mean? Or even… what about your parents. What about Mischa?”

“Perhaps you won't be surprised if I say it was her idea. Or possibly Murasaki. She has an eye on these things.”

Will opens and closes his mouth a few times,

“Would you want to?”

“I'll say what I said to your Pere, it would be a privilege”

“Fucking hell. Abigail Verger Graham Lecter?”

“If you like. Or the other way round. She'll be a Countess one day”

Will does the whole open and close his mouth thing again. Hannibal smiles,

“My love. Not if you don't want it. Or she doesn't. I'll still think of myself as her father”

Will swallows and manages in a small voice,

“I do want it. I can't imagine she wouldn't either. God. Are you going to take our name too? When we…?”

“Of course, Graham-Lecter, hyphenated I think. Your father likes it"

“Oh. Oh my god.”

“Will?”

“It's just. You really do mean all of it don't you? Us? The three of us? You and me?”

“Do you doubt it?”

“I don't know. Me? Me I doubt all the time. I just. It seems so unlikely.”

“To find each other? Yes, I've thought that. I've no intention of losing it, or you. Not if I can help it”

“Margot didn't take ‘Graham’”

“I think we've established that Margot and I have only you and Abigail in common”

Will nods,

“Maybe just Abigail really”

Hannibal can see the truth in it, sad though it is,

“Will. My love. Lithuania won't recognise it, but Italy will. You won't be Count, but you will have some entitlements. But not until papa dies.”

“I hope he won't for a long while”

“I know. Nor do I. But he's pleased about the possibility. He's urging us to go the formal adoption route so that there can be no question over Abigail inheriting.”

“Ok. Wow. Ok. That's very. Is that generous, I think that's. wow. To be clear, I'm actually more interested in the fact you want to be her father”

“My love. Of course. And. Of course I do. But you first. Alright?”

“When you're back?”

“Still not eloping then?”

Will smiles,

“Still not this week”

“There may be no Valentine's parcel but I have one or two ideas?”

“Yeah? Good ideas?”

Will leans down, a little closer, Hannibal continues to smile up at him,

“Perhaps you could find out?”

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 67

Chapter Summary

> And oh some NSFW at the beginning of the chapter, because the trailer was made for some nsfw. Quite a bit off talking too. You know how they roll...

When Hannibal wakes the light is grey outside, he looks over to Will, lying on his front one hand up beside his pillow. He listens to him breathe. Soft. Quiet. Maybe even peaceful. Hannibal thinks back to what they'd talked of the night before. And how fortunate or blessed or grateful or any and all of those words he feels right now. About Will, Abigail, all of it, them.

His gaze is tempered as always by a mix of love, pleasure, longing and, he knows, the thorned tendrils of possession. Will is his, Abigail too. A family. And with this comes a fierce urge to protect and keep safe, possibly even save, from certain hurts and trials. He thinks of what he had said to Beau, the different ways to wage and win a battle. He thinks of the Pastor Reba McClane and her friend Dragon, of Mason. Of the work they're doing. On Molson. A pincer movement then, he has a few ideas.

“If you're thinking of something vaguely sexual you won't have to work hard to persuade me”

Will. Not asleep any more,

“I wasn't especially”

Will opens his eyes and stretches, he doesn't quite reach end to end in the trailer unless he puts his hands above his head, but it's close. They'd had to be careful the night before mainly to avoid Hannibal hitting his head with each urgent claiming thrust.

“Really? And now I'm oddly disappointed. Though still a little achy in the right places”

He stretches again and pushes the quilt down off his chest, sighs, rubs a hand over his throat and upper torso. Hannibal watches, a small smile hovering at the corners of his mouth,

“Are you being intentionally provocative?”

Will blinks at him slowly and languidly,

“I don't know. Is it working?”

For all that Will had sex just four times before he met Hannibal he conveys sexual desire and passion in every slow movement and look and sound. A feast for the senses which Hannibal readily devours.

“Have you practised this?”

Will hooks himself up onto one elbow,

“Interesting. How do you mean?”

Hannibal runs a hand from Will’s cheek, along his jaw, traces a thumb over Will’s lower lip, Will swallows. Hannibal lets his hand drift down Will’s chest, skirting round a nipple as he does so, Will shifts, just a little.

“I wondered if you’ve thought about the image you present?”

“To you? Like this? Yes and no really”

Hannibal smiles, traces his questing finger along the seam between Wills groin and thigh,

“Go on”

“When you said you liked to watch. I thought about it then. What you see, if you like what you see”

“I think you know I do. Very much”

Will grins, let's himself move a little under Hanniba’s still slowly stroking hand,

“It made me think about how involved you were. If you were there, with me. Actively involved”

“Not just passively observing? What do you think now?”

“It's not voyeurism. I know that. It's partly you like to see how I react, mainly to you”

Hannibal smiles again,

“That's true. I like to see what effect I have, what you enjoy, what, well, if you'll forgive the poetics, what lights you up”

Will nods,

“I know. I like it. I'm watching you, watching me, watching you. It's a good loop”

“No real beginning or end to it”

“Yeah. You also save it up. The memory. Maybe for the dry spells?”

There's plenty of truth in it, so Hannibal gently runs a finger along the length of Will’s half hard cock,

“Of course. I'm cataloguing and saving each sigh, each surrender”

They both laugh then,

“That's very good”

“I might be thinking of something sexual now”

“I should hope so. Need a leak first?”

“I love your concern for my prostate”

“Damn right. That's got to keep us both going for a long time!”

“Yours too. I haven't forgotten you know”

Will blushes,

“‘Your fingers my prostate’? Me neither. Opera Weekend?”

“If you'd like. I certainly should.”

“Are we making a wish list? Could we? Yeah, I know. A bit ridiculous”

“No, no, I'm laughing at how faintly perfect that sounds. I think we both enjoy the anticipation”

“As long as it's not too long. Delayed gratification? Only up to a point. Oh. Is that a sex pun too?”

Hannibal huffs a small laugh, leans over and licks a long stroke up the side of Wills neck,

“It could be.”

Will shifts again,

“Ok. Try not to distract me just for a moment. Fuck Hannibal that's not helping”

Hannibal smiles against Will’s skin as he alternates between kisses and nips down Will’s chest and stomach finally settling over Will’s cock where he lazily licks and sucks a little.

Will pants a little,

“God. Ok. Prostate. Valentine's box. There's. Fuck. Two pictures in there. What else? Hannibal? God, I can't believe I'm gonna say stop, just for a second, what else”

“Oh, I had thought of maybe arriving back in the room to find you ready for me”

“Yeah? Naked and open and panting?”

Hannibal makes an amused sound, and then a drawn out sigh,

“I think so. I have a happy thought at being able to collapse into a chair able simply to drink from a glass of wine in one hand, and finger you with the other. Perhaps suck you, stroke myself”

Will lays himself back down, shifts a hand over his own cock, neglected now, though damp from Hannibal's mouth, he huffs a little,

“In this scenario can I suck you as well?”

“If I can simply shove my clothes aside and then bend you over some convenient surface. Perhaps so”

“Hannibal”

“My love?”

“What else? Please”

Hannibal smiles at him, eyebrows quirked a little, Will blushes a little more,

“We don't always get enough time to talk about it, and I want to”

“Darling”

“Tell me. What else?”

“I’d be interested to know what you've thought of”

“Ok? Knowing what I run to. Which I'm afraid is still pretty anal. It's your own fault. You have a great cock”

“I'm so hurt Will”

“Shut up. You know people say they were fucked through the mattress”

“I've heard it”

“I want you to fuck me just enough that I can feel it if I walk around after”

Hannibal laughs,

“So, not through the mattress, just enough to notice it!”

Will nods, looking slightly emabassed,

“I know. I'm a whimp. But I love the being filled up feeling, just not the actual idea of it really hurting”

“Darling I wouldn't want it to”

“I know. But you get the idea?”

“Is it the relentlessness? Or the unequivocal want”

“Oh. Yes, actually. Maybe. Yes.”

“I think you enjoy the feeling of being utterly desired”

Will smiles a little sadly at him,

“I still can't quite believe you do. I do believe you love me. It's not that"

Hannibal looks at him,

“Turn over Will”

“What? Right now?”

“Now”

“Ok. That sounds a bit urgent”

Will turns again onto his front, watching Hannibal pull the small tube of lube from a moulded plastic pocket in the headboard, where he'd stored his watch and cell phone the previous night.

“Do you remember when we first met? I said I was desperate for you? That hasn't changed. I think of you, of this constantly”

“Oh”

“Hold yourself up a little. Good. Thank you”

Will pants his way through Hannibal fingering him open and then pushing inside. It's quick, almost efficient and Will feels Hannibal's forceful concentration and want in every move and pulse and grind.

“Fuck. Hannibal”

“My desire for you Will. Knows no bounds”

Neither of them have the breath to talk then. And Will considers it not as bing fucked through the mattress of his dad’s old camper trailer but another kind of declaration both of intent and claim on Hannibal's part. Hannibal focuses on the sensation, Will giving before him, encircling him, clenching and holding him, the push and hot dark, the need to show Will just how much he is finally and forever loved. Worshipped. Needed.

…….

Beau juggles the two mugs, the inner door and the outer screen. The trailer with its camper shell is only parked a few yards from the back door of the house. He smiles to himself, this is only the second time ever that he's made coffee for Will and someone. Anyone. No youthful sleepovers. No furtive fumbling with some girl, or ok, boy friend. No one. Except the one disastrous attempt when Will and Margot had stayed some time.

It had been so patently unwelcome that he'd never tried a repeat. He'd felt a desperate sadness that even though he'd given up his own room to the couple, even though he'd made it nice and everything it had been clear to him that Margot had taken the bed and that Will had slept in the old armchair, with just a blanket to keep him warm.

He'd despaired for his boy. His odd, quiet, fading boy.

As the outer door closes on its swing with a small snap he pauses. Caught in the moment. Realising that's he's interrupted or at least intruded on quiet, but nevertheless intent and intense sex. He almost blushes. Reflecting that he's hoped for this, kind of, ever since Will was a teenager. He doesn't feel much guilt at the thought, or even at his intrusion in the moment. He's perhaps slightly concerned he might embarrass one or both of them, particular when the next gasp and exhalation is clearly Will and the following threaded growled pleased noise is surely Hannibal.

Beau looks at the two mugs and debates. He's already stood there slightly too long. Maybe he should be a little embarrassed now? He hears Hannibal quietly say,

“Hush. Will. It's fine”

And then louder, still Hannibal's voice,

“Abigail? Are you alright my darling?”

Beau clears his throat,

“Coffee on the doorstoop guys. Breakfast in twenty. When you're done. Alright?”

He winces slightly at his words, he could have phrased that a bit better, oh well, he can always claim not enough practice, if and when Will gives him the evil eye later on, for it,

“Thank you Beau, that's very kind”

Beau hears Will whisper,

“Oh my actual god!”

And then Will giggles. Beau’s heart clenches with pleasure and delight and gladness. That tiny, short, cut off laugh? Amazing. Priceless. He pushes through the doors and back into the house.

“Hey Abs, you look wakeful. Gonna help me with the pancake mix and everything? Then we got some serious un-making to do? Ok girlie?”

Abigail wiggles happily. Buster shifts on her feet and grumbles, though he'll be happy enough once he gets the scent of pancake batter frying in hot oil.

In his pocket Beau fiddles with his six month chip. Next time he gets one at AA it'll be for the full year. Though he might get one month by month, just to keep the score. Even a year ago he hadn't been sure if he'd make it. If there was anything really even to make it for. Now though? God. Now though.

……

Gathered round the scarred work table in Beau’s living room the three men and Abigail jostle elbows for flat ware and crockery

“I hope none of you were expecting any kind of fanciness. This is what we got”

“Beau, since I met Will’s friends and family I've been to three winter barbecues, one potluck, where it certainly lived up to its name, and have eaten some very odd take-out. I'm sure this will be delicious”

They all look at the big pot of tomato soup and the admittedly large pile of grilled cheese sandwiches,

“Grandpere let me add basil to the soup. And we put funny herbs in the cheese”

Hannibal smiles at Abigail,

“As I said, delicious, and I'm already scheming how I can get the most”

“We've got more if you like”

“Then I am already satisfied”

After a good twenty minutes all the sandwiches are gone, the pot is emptied and all four of them sit back in their chairs and smile. Full. Content. Satisfied.

“Did you make the bread?”

“I'm not completely useless in the kitchen”

“The soup was from scratch”

“Hence the basil. And actual tomato”

“Gruyere and mozzarella”

“Yeah, and chilli flakes in some of them”

“I noticed the kick”

Beau snorts,

“You noticed more than the kick”

Will narrows his eyes at his dad. Then relaxes. All on the same page.

“Alright Abs? Nap and then dog W. A. L. K? Alright?”

“Hannibal story and nap? Please?”

Hannibal sighs, if there is a better way to spend a weekend he doesn't know it, even if Beau keeps grinning and just avoiding his eye.

“Story, Nap. W. A. L. K. Dinner repeat?”

She laughs,

“I love you. Thank you. Can we snuggle? Can Tentacles?”

Ah yes, Tentacles, even better.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 68

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Bev thumbs her way down the screen of her cell smiling as she does so,

“Looks like they're having a good time”

Jimmy looks up at her and manages a smile,

“Of course they are. They're not at work on a Sunday going through all kinds of crap and cctv and shit. If he'd been in Manhatten we'd have far more footage.”

Brian snides from over by a scope,

“If he'd been in London we'd have seen him fart”

The other two lab members look at him, he glances up at the silence,

“You know what I mean. Anyway. What they been doing? Cheer me up some”

Bev grins,

“Ok, best bit first or last”

Jimmy and Brian say exactly opposite things. Bev laughs,

“I'll save it to the end. Ok. So normal kind of stuff, walks with the dogs, Abigail talking things apart, that's not right, oh, she's taking things apart, mostly what she's meant to though Will says she took the toaster apart when no one was really paying attention which wasn't really meant to happen. Actually, talking things apart is quite an Abs thing to do.”

“Sounds like her. How's Beau been?”

“Good by the sound of it, they went to the VA! There was a cook-out and non-noisy fireworks which sounds ridiculous, but actually makes a lot of sense. He's cooked a lot. Will says he's gone all out in a low-key way, he made the bread for grilled cheese sandwiches!”

The two men laugh, it's a perfect image,

“Nice. How's he getting on with Hannibal?”

“Also good. They've had a long discussion about the Punic Wars and the original Hannibal. Who knew he was into that kind of thing? Beau I mean. Not our Hannibal. Ok. Oh and a discussion about Hannibal formally adopting Abigail.”

All three of them stop what they're doing, Jimmy smiles and shakes his head,

“Damn! This is really going to happen. Do you think Will took it seriously about being a flower boy? Can I remind him tactfully?”

Bev rolls her eyes,

“Yeah. It'll be fine. I don't think that's gonna happen for a bit.”

Jimmy shrugs,

“I just don't want him to forget”

She carries on,

“Ok. So there's that. And oh yeah Mischa is coming this week. Hannibal wants to know if we want to all come for supper on Friday to meet her? Waddya reckon? Ok, I'll let him know. Will and Abs will be with Molson and Marissa. So, maybe we can do some sympathetic magic or something, send them good vibes?”

The three of them momentarily send up what ever their own version of positive thoughts are for the Vergers and Will.

“Ok. So I've been saving the best bit. Ready?”

Brian and Jimmy nod,

“Ok. So, will and Hannibal are sleeping in the camper, yeah? The old trailer with the shell? That's fine. Hannibal sleeps in a sodding tent in hot cold hot country that hates its own weather, so that's not a problem. Anyway, Beau very kindly made them coffee and brought it out to them yesterday morning? Sweet of him. Except he caught them right in the middle of having sex”

She pauses, waits for it to land and then the three of them laugh thoroughly.

“No? That's fantastic! What happened?”

“Apparently Hannibal told Will not to worry and asked Beau to leave the coffee on the porch and thank you. Beau made some comment about breakfast when they'd finished. And he's been secretly grinning and evading the issue ever since. Will thinks he's delighted!”

“You're not kidding. I wonder if he's mostly relieved?”

Bev and Jimmy look at Brian,

“He knows Will has had a miserable time. Even with our help and support and incredible presence in his life, I know, I know, keep nodding both of you, but we know it's been shit. I've seen Will smile more in a week than in a year since Hannibal appeared on the scene. Even when Will was having the headaches he was basically happy. Come on. He's great with Abs, he's a brilliant friend, but really? Even before Margot? Even when he first joined the team? Jim you know?”

Jimmy nods in agreement, he'd liked Will straight off, he'd joined before Brian and just before Beverly. And even then, with a partner he was already engaged to he'd seemed quiet and sad. Not excessively throw himself around the room sad, just, sad. Jimmy had worked on him and found him warm and friendly so he'd struggled to work out why he seemed to have bug friends, Margot, and not many others.

Bev joining the team had livened things up and eventually Will had explained about the synethesia, the low level feelings of isolation, worry about being overwhelmed by others. And slowly, slowly

the team had come together and knitted itself as one. By the time Abigail was born they were close, and when Margot was killed five years later they were solid. Ready, almost for anything. Though it had been a terrible thing. Jimmy sighs,

“Yeah. He is. It's true. Happiness is a bit of a virus too. A contagion”

They pause at that, they'd had a bad case with some abducted children where Jack had said that family could be like that, Brian shakes his thoughts away from it, Bev had actually shot the abductor, he carries on,

“So. Beau is probably happy, I was going to say embarrassed, but maybe not. I think he's just likely to be pleased!”

“Yeah. Probably. Actually, yeah. You're right. So. That's the best bit. We gonna tell him where we've got to with our flower guy? He’s asking?”

“What did Jack say?”

She scrunches her nose,

“Yeah. I should call him not text him about it. I can pretend we're not at work?”

“He won't believe you. You shouldn't have said about the camellias if you hoped for that!

She resigns herself,

“Alright. I'll call him, maybe he'll find it reassuring?”

Jimmy and Brian both raise their eyebrows at her.

…….

Roland Umber closes his bedroom door with a sharp click. God. Why don't people get it? He doesn't want to ‘go out and make some friends his own age.’ He likes bugs! So what ‘if it's not normal for someone to spend so much time on them’, they're amazing. And clever. And beautiful. And don't ask stupid questions or want stupid things from you.

He dumps his school bag on his bed and then carefully takes out his scrapbook. Inside he's got a wide collection of cuttings about entomology and moths in particular. So amazing. Cocoons? All that potential. Just waiting to be released. He thinks of the reporter who's been hanging round. Freddie Lounds, all red hair and wise cracks. Smart woman. Lots of potential. He stretches his back and rolls his shoulders. He knows all about potential, waiting to be released.

……

“It was Bev. The lab worked out the picture the letters were based on”

Will looks between Hannibal and Beau, speaking in French, although Abigail is in the next room he'd rather she didn't overhear.

“It was taken last year. The labs held an open day for prospective FBI applicants and we did quite a few tours and things, for the people who had a science major? Ok anyway, we're pretty sure it was taken then. One of the documents guys reconstructed what it looks like, it is me and Bev, we've got

a picture on the wall behind us with Jimmy and Brian in it, it's not really a picture, it's just a projection, it was during one of the talks. Anyway. I'm labouring it. They're now going through all the lists of people who came to the open day and matching them to photos for the temporary passes and matching them against the cctv from the florist. They haven't got a DMV match. So maybe not a driver"

He smiles at his father and his partner,

"Don't look so worried. It's also the certainly someone who came to the open day. Wants some attention. Trying to be too clever for their own good"

Hannibal frowns,

"And you're sure it's not Cassie?"

"Cassie? Pretty sure. It wasn't Nick in the shop. Oh dad. You don't know about this? Did I tell you? Intern at work, got a silly crush on me, her brother got mighty pissed. Thwacked me one"

Beau is about to speak when Hannibal holds up a hand,

"Valentine's day. I'd only recently got off a plane. It was unfortunate."

Will grins,

"Yeah. One way of putting it. Anyway, they checked the cctv for Nick, definitely not him. Apparently that was Bev's first thought. That she hasn't got over it? But if it really is about the team? I dunno. Maybe still someone who wants attention? Not going about it the right way. But Jack's wondering about someone wanting an edge in the next round of applications."

Will sees their faces,

"Hey. I didn't say it was smart. Just. Wants attention. Especially if it's some grad student, being all mysterious and special snowflake"

He's sees the expression on their faces,

"Yeah? Don't ask"

…….

Mischa packs the last of her things into her suitcase. She tends to pack light, just a range of shirts, a few skirts, two pairs of slacks, two cardigans. A suit for the work bits. Three pairs of shoes. She grimaces, heels yes for sure, flats also, and then something more leisurely and sturdy. Maybe she'll wear the flats on the plane. Easy to take off and on. And she's sure to need the sturdy, for walks, and anything involving Abigail.

She packs a smart puffy, also for the leisurely activity she's promising herself. And then hums and hahs over a dress. It's possible she'll go out for dinner. Ok. Yes to a dress. She turns to her small collection of jewellery. Double strand of pearls. Small earrings that match. A diamond pendant. She tends to keep her wrists empty. One ring. But she wears that most of the time, she considers another few necklaces. They hardly take up any space. She adds an amber string. Then thinks of the cabochon lapis lazuli Bedelia gave her, graded stones. Alright, yes to that too.

She takes her favoured coat into the light and scrutinises it. She makes a face, really it could do with a clean. There's still two days. She could take it in tomorrow. She puts it aside and then locates a hat, some leather gloves, a silk scarf. She looks through a cupboard searching for a small pack bag, something she can use on the non work, non Bedelia days. Oh, yes, one form the Louvre. A painting printed on the side. Really? Does the ubiquity of certain images inoculate us against their potency?

She finds her preferred work bag. She looks through and decants everything small enough and not required for the next day into a handbag. She smiles to herself.

In the living room Cat lies on the floorboards in the weak Spring light spreading through the window of her Brussels' apartment. She ignores him. He deigns to ignore her though he comes to eat the food she puts down and raises his head briefly into the touch she's careful not to offer too obviously. He shudders. Ugh. People.

She smiles again and has a moment of insight and wonders if really that's somewhat what it's like for Will. Wanting and not wanting to be touched. And if so, not to be overwhelmed by it. Hannibal told her about the colours and everything. Maybe he and Cat? Cat goes back to the patch of light and turns a look on her. They stare at one another unblinking for a few moments. Then he closes his eyes and settles into a sphinx like pose and rumbles a purr.

Quite like Will then.

……

Chapter End Notes

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I've a new story starting on Tuesday... The Lighthouse, 20 Chapters, Post Twotl, canon compliant, more or less.

I've recently written for the Murder Husbands Big Bang (due out in October when the artists have done their thing) and it got me totally immersed in the second half of season three (again). That plus I spent six weeks staying in a lighthouse once, and, well, you'll see.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 69

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

>My dear Hannibal,

Your father has said that Mischa will join you this week. I'm glad to hear it. I'm hoping too that you will perhaps talk some sense into each other.

Hannibal, Mischa needs encouragement. From what I understand she is still terrified. I trust you and Will to help her see past this. She may not appreciate me having told you so I trust you will be discrete. I am hoping too that she will manage to talk to you seriously about adopting Abigail formally. To be frank it would make everything much more straight forward.

Of course this is dependent on you having fixed on Will. I believe you have. If you are not sure then perhaps I should send you your own letters of the last few months.

Robertus and I are delighted. Will seems both sensible and sweet. And though I am largely indifferent to both I know you are not and that he is, as is the popular parlance, good for you. And we are glad of it. We hope you might manage to visit? Perhaps once you've been re-posted as your father believes is now likely. We hope so. We shall be closer. Albeit not by much.

I am confident you have been making plans for when you return to your base? If you haven't I'd encourage you to think this through, and soon. How long do you have left? Two weeks? Three? They will go quickly. I'm sure you will not thank me to remind you of it. I'd encourage you to both live in the present dream and plan for the future reality.

I remain, your loving aunt,

Murasaki<

Hannibal reads the letter again, it had been waiting for him when he arrived back at their rental. She's right of course. And with Mischa coming so soon, and then the Opera weekend, he smiles a little to himself at the thought, and then, well, then they will face the whirlwind of packing and getting ready and departure. And yes. Only two weeks. Or rather, just a little more.

But not enough more. And they still haven't quite decided what to say to the General. Three months or six. Slowed promotion and sideways move, or faster promotion and maybe a step ahead? Weighed up against being here with Will and Abigail. And it's always so hard to tell when Will is being simply reasonable and compassionate and when he hates something but still thinks it's better for the other person. In this case, for Hannibal. Tricky.

Hannibal shifts the coins in his pocket, clicks them against each other and then pulls one out. Just a half dollar. He weighs it minutely in his hand. It's not heavy in the slightest, he tosses it and on seeing the outcome he smiles to himself. Alright then. He looks at his hold-all in the corner by the front door. He's too tired tonight. He'll deal with it tomorrow.

…….

Will hugs his father,

“We’ll see you Sunday? Right? It's not so long. I won't smack him before then. I've made a promise to myself."

Beau nods,

“Give him a chance to say his piece. You never know.”

Will laughs briefly.

“I know you're right. So much has changed hasn't it? I'm still surprised. Oh, and thanks for not giving Hannibal a hard time. You know?”

Beau is about to make a deeply inappropriate joke about the giving of ‘hard times’ when they both realise what Will has said and suddenly they're both laughing. Will manages to stutter out,

“God. That's not what I meant at all! Damn! God. Pere!”

His father wipes an eye,

“Will? Honestly? If he makes an honest man of you I couldn't be happier. Looks like that's pretty settled?”

Will glances over to where Abigail is sitting in the back of the car. The dogs are both still loose and they're tearing around, wearing themselves out before the journey to Molson and Marissa’s home. Not so far away but far enough they'll need to stop a couple of times.

“I think so. When Hannibal comes back. Barring disaster I guess. We're not telling her yet. And he hasn't done the whole big proposal performance yet.”

Beau laughs,

“You holding out for that then?”

Will smirks a little,

“Too right! Though if I get in there first, I've a few ideas.”

Beau quirks an eyebrow up,

“Is it better I don't ask? It's better I don't ask isn't it?”

“Brian asked Jimmy in the SUV with Bev sitting in the back silently egging him on.”

“I can't decide which bit of that sentence is the least likely. Yeah. Actually I can. The Bev being silent bit”

“Really? Yeah. Actually. I guess. She won't be there for Hannibal's I promise you that!”

Beau laughs.

“Alright then. Look. Be safe and don't worry too much about Molson until he proves himself an idiot.”

He sees the slightly sceptical look on Will's face,

"Yes, yes. Alright then. More of an idiot. Again."

……

Abigail sits in the car, strapped in now, and waves good bye to her grandpere. It's nice that he's coming to see them at her other grandparents. It's nice when they're all together. As big a family as they can manage.

"When's Aunty Mischa going to arrive?"

"Mischa? Oh, she should get in late tomorrow. Why's that Abs?"

"Is Uncle Mason coming?"

"Uh huh. On Thursday evening. And pere on Sunday, he'll overlap with Mason a little. Why honey?"

"Can Aunty Mischa and Hannibal come?"

Will sighs. He's had a go at explaining that really it's for Margot's side of the family, the older bit of the family, but she hadn't got it. Or worse. She got it entirely and doesn't like it one bit. He wonders just how unfair it would be to unleash her on Molson and see what happens. Maybe he won't even have to try, maybe she'll just launch herself in?

"I think that as it's your grandparents house they've already made a big effort, you, me, Uncle Mason, Buster and Winston, your grandpere. That's a full house right there. And the Pastor and Dragon are coming for a meal and we'll see them at church. Right? Abs?"

In the rear view mirror she can just see she's having a little bit of a pout about it.

"I want to see Aunty Mischa"

"And you're going to! She and Hannibal are having dinner with Preller and Molly and Bev on Friday, which will be very nice for all of them. And then we get to see her the following week. So we shall all be having a nice time! And she's got her own friends to visit too. People we don't know very well. She has a particular friend, Hannibal told you about Bedelia?"

Abigail sighs, yes, she knows about Bedelia, she sounds like a snow princess. And as long as she doesn't take up too much of Aunty Mischa's time that's ok! And she does get to spend the weekend with her aunt. Whilst her daddy and Hannibal go to some special thing in New York.. but it would just be nice if they were all together this weekend. So her grandma can meet her aunt. She's never had an aunt before after all. So it matters. She scrunches up her nose. If he father saw he'd know something was up. Maybe it would be better not to say anything. Her daddy might not approve.

She gives Tentacles a fierce look. Really, adults need such a lot of help sometimes, just to do sensible things.

……..

Sometimes you can't help but wonder if an event or a word or a person acts as a pivot point. The fulcrum on which the world turns. When Abigail ups and asks why Hannibal and Mischa haven't

been invited for the weekend no one gives Molson an easy way out. Will turns his eyes down and looks at his plate. Marissa makes a sharp exit to the kitchen muttering about the next course and is that burning she can smell?

Abigail looks at her grandpa. He's mean. He's ornery. He's a cussin bastard. But he loves his granddaughter. Something big and terrible and fight all the monsters he's scared want to devour her the way his daughter got et all up. He beckons her to him,

“Alright little girl come over here and sit. Tell me all about why I should let them folks come, hey?”

She smiles at him, boy has she got this, it's not what she thinks or says but Will can see it all over her face. He slides out of his chair and Molson carefully doesn't look at him so he doesn't look back.

In the kitchen Marissa asks,

“What are they talking about now?”

“He asked why you should invite them. So she's telling him”

Marissa nods,

“Alright then. Let's give her a chance to do her thing”

“You'd be alright with it?”

“Will honey? As long as you don't scare the horses I ain't got a mind to it”

He's about to remind her they haven't had horses for maybe fifteen years when he gets it.

“Oh. I... Thank you Marissa”

He gets a little twisted up inside. This is as clear a sign of solidarity as he could hope. She puts a gentle hand on his arm,

“You were so good to her Will. Don't think I didn't see it. She and I struggled, perhaps that was kind of inevitable. She was stormy minded. So am I too. But you were just the sweetest she could have hoped for. I think she knew she was lucky. I hope she did. I did. I do.”

Marissa has a tendency towards quiet, a counterpart to the bluster and boil of her husband. So this is a kind and wordy admission from her. Will smiles again. God. Things do get better. Sometimes.

……

Will whispers into his cell phone,

“I don't know what's going to happen. But Molson has been real quiet this evening. After Abigail had her little talk with him”

At the other end of the call Hannibal smiles,

“She's probably our most effective advocate wouldn't you say?”

He gently twirls the glass of wine he's holding in his hand, wishing so much that he could drain it and look across at Will rather than at the empty chair where he usually sits of an evening.

“I think you're right. I'll keep you posted! So. Mischa. Tomorrow?”

“Yes. Tomorrow. I'll collect her and then she'll stay here tomorrow and Friday night and then to Bedelia over the weekend.”

“I'm sorry. I hadn't quite realised. So you'll be on your own after all?”

“Not to worry. I have some paperwork to review. And you'll be home Tuesday.”

“It's a week”

“It is”

“If you're mentally rehearsing things like ‘it's good practice’ or the like, can I just say I've been through all those and I think they're all rubbish. Ok?”

“Believe me, we’re on the same page. Have you thought further about the offer from the General?”

“I think we should go for the six months”

Hannibal pauses, Will sounds quite certain about this, maybe,

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. And before you worry, because I know you are already..."

Hannibal smiles, what it is to have all your insecurities known and understood and not exploited by the person professing to love you.

“Yeah? Before you worry, it's not because of anything anyone here has said. Really. It's to do with promotion. And with postings. There's more of a chance of it being shorter anyway isn't there? Than even the General knows?”

Hannibal nods, even though Will can't see him do so,

“Yes. It's not impossible. Maybe as little as four months”

“In which case only a month longer than if you took Matthew Brown’s job? Isn't it? So. Although I'd rather it was even less I think it makes most sense”

“And you'd be willing for me to carry on?”

“Hey, do I get to be an army husband in some exotic location?”

“I think you're thinking of the Diplomatic service”

“Am I? Damn. I think you're right. Don't you have camp followers these days?”

Hannibal gives a small bark of laughter,

“My darling. I miss you already”

“I know. Me too. Hey. Did you find the card? No picture yet. Just the quotation? It's in your hold-all inner pocket”

“I didn't. I admit I haven't really unpacked. Hold on. Let me find it”

Hannibal pulls himself up out of the chair and first finds and then opens his bag. Still not emptied from the weekend, he must put the washing at least in the laundry. He finds the small envelope and slides a thumbnail under the flap to release it. Inside is the seventh of their quotation cards, though the sixth is in the Valentine's package, he smiles at it as he reads it,

“My dearest Will.”

“You like it?”

“You must know I do.”

……..

“I want to do with you what Spring does with the Cherry trees” Pablo Neruda

……

Chapter End Notes

.....

Ah life, how l love her and cuddle her and still she is a fickle mistress. I'm sorry for no updates for the longest time! Here we are though. Happy Hannigram day!

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 70

Chapter Summary

Guest appearance by Paulo Sogliato! No ice-pick tho'.

Brief discussion at the end about the East Coast serial killer the group is after.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mischa shoulders her bag and extends the handle of her small suitcase. She walks sharply towards the exit pretending an alertness she doesn't quite feel. Once through customs and the gate she looks around for Hannibal. She's on time so he should be here.

Hannibal smiles at Paulo. It was something of a shock to be waiting nonchalantly at the gate for Mischa and to be grasped bodily and kissed firmly on each cheek, though less surprising once he recognised his kisser.

“Hannibal! What are you here for? Not for me I know. Extraordinary. No? I did not know you were here!”

“I'm here to collect my sister, but I'm here for an eight week thing. What about you?”

“Oh you know. NATO. Not long. Just a week. We should catch up?”

Hannibal pauses. He and Paulo had had something of a stormy time of it in the Balkans. Both posted in Sarajevo as part of the NATO peace-keeping forces. Paulo had always been up front about his partner Rinaldo, who also worked for NATO but on the civilian side. Nevertheless he'd pursued an affair with Hannibal. And Hannibal had succumbed. Just occasionally. He's told Will all about it, but, well, they've only two weeks left and Will won't thank him for pushing off for drinks with an old flame.

“Kind of you but it's likely to be very hectic. Someone collecting you?”

“Oh, you know. A car. Or something. I should look for the notice. You know? The little sign the driver carries. They'll have massacred my surname as usual.”

“Sogliato? Not so difficult surely?”

“You'd think not. So many Italian Americans. But apparently I'm wrong about that! I won't burden you. At least Lecter is straightforward? Or do you get it with an ‘o’ or an ‘a’?”

Hannibal laughs,

“You're right of course. Well. It was a pleasure to see you. I hope it goes well?”

Paulo laughs and smooths down his moustaches and small beard in a characteristic gesture Hannibal recognises. It usually means he's feeling sleek and pleased.

“Thank you! And, well, let me give you my card. It has my cell. If you change your mind.”

He laughs and fishes out a little card and pushes it into Hannibal's outer top jacket pocket and then pats his chest and smiles. Hannibal doesn't take it out but sees Paulo smile a little more smugly at him. He did always think he was the one calling the shots in their dalliance.

When he saunters off in search of his driver Hannibal forces himself not to watch the little swagger he knows Paulo will carry with him. He still a compact, well put together, attractive man. Hannibal thinks very hard of the ways in which Will outshines Paulo. Paulo always did have the way of commanding attention no matter who else was in the room. He sighs. Glad not to be too caught up.

He pauses then. He's generally good at taking stock. What had that just felt like? He can't quite get it. Oh. Wait. He knows what it is. Relief. It's relief. Paulo had been flirty and enjoyable and very entertaining company. And for the grim job the forces had been tasked with he'd certainly been a lot of fun in contrast, and very enthusiastic about sex. But. Nothing more than that. Hannibal had known then it had zero future and was like the bubbles in champagne, exciting and lively at the time, and flat the following day leaving you with something thin and slightly acidic that didn't sit quite right in your stomach.

Will though is nothing like that at all. Will is.. he tries for similar metaphor. Something with a long finish. Smooth, complex, seasoned, with mellowness, and fruit, and something you find yourself still savouring days later. The taste of which you hasten to find again on your tongue. Something profound and deep. He smiles. He thinks Will would too. He feels the coins in his pocket again. Then looks around to see his sister standing watching him,

“Hello Hannibal, who was the man?”

Mischa puts her arms round him in a warm embrace but gives him a hard look, he knows he'll have to explain, but first things first,

“And hello to you. My darling. Come with me, let me take your bag. Are you very tired? I want you to give me some advice.”

Mischa frowns, alright, he's handled that well but he better tell her. If he's being an idiot she's going to smack him, older brother Colonel or no!

……

In a florist in Washington DC a young man walks in and buys a bunch of jonquil. He asks for it to be tied with ribbon and green tissue. He seems to hum and hah over a message but eventually writes a small card and the florist tucks it in with the bouquet.

Her shop isn't on the list that the FBI have circulated so she doesn't ask for his name or address or anything, just takes the money for the flowers and the details of where they should be sent. She does however have a discussion with him about tattoos. She has a small rose on the back of a finger and they discuss the pain of various placements on the body. He shows her a lovely koi on his right calf and lets her take a photo of it.

After he's gone she ponders why anyone should pick just jonquil to send to an FBI lab. She's not especially into conspiracy theories but isn't that just a bit odd? She debates if for half an hour, and then gives them a quick ring.

Two hours later and Jack Crawford, Jimmy, Brian and Bev are there collecting trace, statements, the cctv footage, and praise be three working cameras. They've even got witness statements from people in the surrounding shops. Next door is an especially rich source as it's one of those old fashioned barbers where people sit around for hours talking and drinking tea or coffee. Jack thanks all the gods he knows of. This might give them the break they need. He asks Bev,

“Find out what jonquil means”

……

Will stands out on the porch while Reba sits on the Verger’s swing, gently toeing off the ground so she moves back and forwards a little, she's smiling slightly,

“What did he say in the end”

He takes a small drink of the tea Marissa made him,

“He apologised. Quite fulsomely I should say.”

“And how does that feel right now”

Will makes a small face, which he remembers she can't see,

“Honestly?”

“What would be the point otherwise?”

“Fair enough. I'm not sure. Of course I'm glad. But.”

She nods,

“Of course. It doesn't change the past does it?”

“No. It can't”

“I think forgiveness means you finally know you can't fix the past”

“Who's the one being forgiven in that version?”

“Good question? Who needs forgiving do you think? Apart from Molson. Who needs to forgive himself apart from anything else”

“Margot probably. I guess we all don't quite forgive her even if we don't blame her.”

He pauses,

“I've just about forgiven myself.”

Reba smiles,

“That's good. You should. You seem lighter this time. Since I saw you last.”

Will makes no comment about the fact she can't actually see him, it's just her way, and maybe she does see things that aren't obscured by having to look for them.

“Can I tell you something you can't tell Mason or any of the others?”

“You can trust me. Yes.”

“We think we found Margot’s killer. Not the actual person but we think we've got a link to some other cases. Active ones. We might get him.”

She pauses and he watches her bite her lip.

“The FBI?”

“Yes.”

“What's that feel like?”

Will Huff's a small noise,

“Good. Strangely? Or not strangely? You understand?”

She nods vigorously,

“Oh yes. No one can blame you for it, or her, actually. Don't you think. I'm glad Molson came to this place before he knew this.”

Will looks at her, and slowly he understands all that this means. Yes. It is better. It's much much better.

“You're right. God. That's, that's something else.”

“And Hannibal? What did Molson have to say about that?”

“He said he's still thinking on that. His actual words were ‘I don't rightly mind as such, but I don't know no one like that.’ I pointed out he knew me and he went all quiet again. So he's thinking about it. I'll take it. Really. In the circumstances. Did you hear what Abigail said to him?”

Reba nods, she's heard versions from Marissa, from Abigail, and quietly, earlier, out walking under the apple trees the Vergers have in the yard Molson had explained. He'd had his hand on her elbow guiding her round, telling her about the plants, each scion, every graft and rootstock. And had slowly unbent about the things Abigail had told him. But Reba can keep his confidences too. Even if the handkerchief he'd quietly wept into in shame and confusion is now damply in her pocket. He'd clasped her elbow tighter without thought when he told the worst of it as far as he was concerned.

“I've heard. We'll have to wait and see won't we?”

“Sure. For all we know by the time Hannibal moves back we’ll all have got there.”

Reba smiles again. Will is one of the most generous men she's ever met. And better at forgiving and communicating that forgiveness than maybe he knows.

…….

Mischa's eyes are shining at what might be the fifteenth funny story that Jimmy has told at the expense of someone in the lab. Will's colleagues are just very enjoyable. And clearly beyond tired! And the effort they're going to over dinner in the circumstances? It's clear to Mischa how much Will must mean to them. Bev yawns,

"Ok. So the guy sent jonquil which means 'desire for affection to be returned', and we got some stellar fingerprints, ok, ok, Jimmy did."

Jimmy grins,

"We gotta say the guy is both an idiot and very clever because they come back! But to a guy we've got on record, and who's in the DMV! Which isn't our guy! Because none of the stills we've got from the open day match the picture in the DMV, but they do match the guy on cctv in both florists."

Brian nods,

"Jack's baffled, but convinced its some applicant. But they don't have photos so some poor sods in varying field offices around the whole country have got to go out and take pictures of all the current batch of applicants as well as everyone who's enquired this year, and everyone who has been interviewed or told to apply in the next cycle. Which is almost 700 people. It's going to take weeks."

He sighs.

"If it's really an applicant I think Jack might get them charged with wasting official time, or obstruction or something."

Hannibal frowns but it's Mischa who asks,

"And you're sure it's not a stalker?"

Bev sighs,

"About 80% sure. It's just too distant? Stalkers almost always make direct contact with their target much earlier in the 'game' for want of a better word. It's not a game, but you know what I mean, in the stalking. And none of us have had that kind of persistent contact from anyone."

Jimmy joins in the sighing,

"Really? It's a distraction. So it's both good and bad. We're already two days past the cycle if the east coast guy is going to hit again. I hate the waiting. We all do. But none of us say anything."

Mischa leans in,

"In case you jinx it?"

“Exactly! We're not superstitious. Ok. I am a bit. Brian and Bev are too sensible. But I worry. Especially when it's late.”

The others look at him, Hannibal asks,

“How long before you stop worrying after the due date?”

“I don't. Until the close of the next cycle, then it ramps up again, just a little more. If it goes on for a long time between finds and we think he's killing I usually get a bit hysterical by the time we do hear something.”

They're all quiet then. Molly is used to this kind of talk from the team. Even so it's relatively unusual for them to be tracking a long term case and be in the middle of what they think is a cycle as regular as this one, especially as it's one that's been going on for so long.

Hannibal frowns again,

“How do you all cope?”

Brian smiles at him and reaches out and pats his arm,

“It's not too bad. Jimmy screeches. I get obsessive about details. Bev drinks slightly too much and bitches at Molly, Molly in turn makes cake and bitch slaps Jimmy and Bev and invites me over to clean. Will usually spends more time on long walks with the dogs. Or he fishes.”

Mischa smiles,

“I didn't know he fished. Hannibal?”

Hannibal smiles,

“Nor did I.”

The team all look at him in astonishment, until Bev says,

“Wow. That's awesome! You've taken over from fishing.”

Mischa bursts out laughing,

“Oh Hannibal! That's perfect. You're the fish substitute!”

He narrows his eyes at her.

Chapter End Notes

If you're in Texas... I send much love and care. I hope very much you'll be ok. I know there are a few readers from there. I know it's a big state, and probably only small comfort but I'm thinking so hard of you. Xxx.

(And this note was the main reason I posted tonight not tomorrow. I was going through all the comments trying to find all the Texans then thought a new chapter was an easier way to reach you if you saw AO3 at all!)

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 71

Chapter Notes

> This chapter is especially for the lovely Vix-Spes, welcome back to London honeybee... aren't you glad you're not in Notting Hell where the detritus is still two feet deep! And they were cleaning at 4 am! Dgih.

Jimmy, bless him, thinks he might cry a little. Either from relief, which he hates himself for, or because there's another body, and it means they're not waiting any longer. Another woman. And near one of the previous sites. Damn. He and Brian will have to go and get her. He reads the message from Jack again. Sits up in bed and swings his legs over the side. Kicks his heels a little, aww, hell,

"Brian? Hey? I'm gonna make coffee? Do you want me to bring it? Jack's texted. They found her."

Brian harrumphs. Of the two of them he's actually better in the mornings but Jimmy had been tearful and upset after the dinner last night and the evening had gradually rolled around into dawn before either of them got much sleep. And not for fun reasons.

"Coffee? Yeah. Please. Are we going?"

Jimmy sighs,

"Yeah. Cassie's bringing the SUV. Jack's sending her instead as Will's still out. She's picking up Bev and then coming here."

Brian pulls a pillow over his head,

"How long?"

Jimmy equivocates.

"Maybe forty minutes. Time for coffee and a shower and to pack an overnight."

"Alright. I'm up. Thanks for coffee though. You ok?"

Brian knows Jim will be feeling it, that little superstitious angstyness, did he jinx it or not.

"She will have been killed before Jim. You know that? Right?"

Jimmy shrugs. Knowing it and feeling it are two different things. He pushes at Brian's shoulder.

"You're good. I'm on the coffee."

.....

Abigail watches her father over the breakfast table. There's a certain amount of humour and her grandpa and her daddy seem to have made up some. Her uncle is being fun and even Dragon who stayed in his van last night has come in for breakfast. Another quiet but larger than life presence at the table. He asks Will,

"We've got a truck, over the church, engine trouble. Molson said you might know?"

Will looks at him in some surprise,

"Well, sure. I'm good with engines. If I can't do it pere will probably fix it right up tomorrow. Maybe we could all go?"

Marissa smiles,

"I can put up a picnic, make a day of it. If we like? Honey?"

She looks at her husband and then at her son, Mason shrugs, and oh, he looks so like his father when he does that, her heart does a little skip. Her boy. All grown now. And smiling. God. At last. She wonders faintly if it's to do with that soldier girl. He's talked a bit about her. They seem to text now and then. He'd smiled when she'd asked, 'just friends' he'd said. And maybe he means that. Either way it'd be good for him.

Molson makes a face, he'd forgotten about the engine, but it's a good idea.

"Why not? There's that fence too, needs fixin. We could get to that?"

There are nods all round and Abigail smiles. Good. She's got a definite plan now.

.....

Mischa smiles and stretches. Abigail's room is very entertaining. Even in the brief time they've been there she's made it her own space. The little dog figurines all along the mantelpiece, a small collection of ephemera, probably collected on walks with the dogs, bits of sheep's rovings, a few small bones, a tiny skull which might be a mice or a mole, Mischa isn't sure. Three things which she's not sure about but look like lumps of dung? How unlikely. She'll have to remember to ask Hannibal. On the walls three Hello Kitty posters carefully framed and four smaller pictures which she recognises from Hans Christian Andersen stories.

There's a knock at the door and Hannibal comes in with tea. He sits on the chair beside her bed and she shuffles up until she's sitting.

"I don't recall the last time we did this?"

She smiles,

"Me neither. It's always quick smart in some terrible airport lounge, or a hotel lobby. When was the last time you came to Brussels? Have you even been to the new apartment?"

"How long have you lived there? Two years?"

"Three."

"In that case no.. and I haven't met Cat either."

"I'm not sure anyone really has. How is it with the dogs now?"

"I'm still equal third. And now, also equal fish! Really Mischa! Will's friends will have a terrible opinion of me. Brian told me over the washing up that Will's known for it. Brings fish in during the season and everything. Fly-fishing apparently. I had no idea."

They both laugh, and Mischa asks,

"Aren't there any rods or anything?"

Hannibal frowns.

"Not here. I don't think so. I suppose we've all been too busy."

"Well, Robertus will be pleased, and of course it's something to look forwards to when you're here properly?"

"Fresh fish?"

"No! Being a fishing widow. Or widower, in your case. If he's that keen. Though maybe Bev's right. He was just waiting to catch something he didn't want to throw back?"

"I preferred it when you were on different continents."

"Who? Me and Will?"

"Will. Beverly. Take your pick."

He smiles at her and they both drink some of the tea.

"What are your plans for today? Perhaps a walk this morning and then? What time are you meeting Bedelia?"

"A walk sounds very good. I'm not expected until this evening. She's some thing at the university. I know. At the weekend. Awful."

"It's as if we have never worked at the weekend ourselves!"

She grins.

"I know. Never!"

.....

Marissa, Reba and Mason are fixing the makings of lunch when Abigail runs in the door,

"Daddy's stung! Daddy's stung! Buster got in the yeller jacksets, daddy had to get him, but he got stung, he got stung!"

Her voice rises a little hysterically and Marissa and Mason rush for the door, Reba holds Abigail's hand tight and the little girl hiccoughs and cries. Gently Reba takes her out onto the back lawn. She can hear the commotion over near one of the old sheds the church has on its property. The dogs

both barking, Dragon clearly after one of them from the discussion he's having with Winston. Though it's Buster who's stung? Isn't it?

She can hear Molson worrying at Will, Marissa insisting they've got sting stuff in the car, Mason cursing at the yellow jacket nest under the shed. She can hear Will too reassuring anyone who'll listen that he's alright, just a couple of stings. The voices get closer to them. Will swearing quietly. Mason commenting on the swelling of his hand and on his wrist. She hears Will say,

"I'm not allergic. This is a normal reaction. It'll be fine. It's just painful. Damn. Sorry Abs. I'm ok. Really. Fuck."

He pants a little and then Reba hears a scuffle, she asks urgently what's happening, it's Marissa who answers,

"He must have got some down his neck, he's been stung under his shirt, there's some fighting with his clothes to get them out. I'm going for the sting stuff."

Reba becomes aware that Abigail is ramping up her crying, only now it's a high pitched wail,

"Hannnnnnnballllllll"

Molson rushes over to her,

"Are you stung girlie? What's the matter? Did it get you? Your pa's ok. I promise."

She doesn't stop though and Reba feels her hand clutched tighter. She can hear Abigail wailing, Will swearing, Mason bellowing, and the Dragon still chasing after the dogs. It's low level chaos.

"Molson? Marissa?"

Neither of them answer her so she just hangs on to Abigail hoping for it all to calm down a little and get clearer what's happened.

.....

"Hannibal? Someone at the door. Shall I get it?"

She hears something indistinct from further inside the house so she shrugs and goes to the door and opens it.

"Hello? Can I help?"

The elderly man on the other side squints at her and frowns,

"Who the heck are you girlie?"

She blinks in surprise at him,

"I might ask you the same?"

"Will's father-in-law. You some lady friend?"

She's not wild about the tone but she remembers the backstory,

"Hannibal's sister. Mischa. I'm glad to meet you. Though I didn't know we were expecting you."

Molson is about to answer when Hannibal comes to the door behind Mischa's shoulder, the old man isn't known to him though he looks just faintly familiar, oh.

"Mr Verger? I'm Hannibal Lecter. Is everything alright?"

"Will got stung. He's alright. But Abigail is having a conniption fit. You better come."

"And you drove, what, two hours to tell us? You didn't ring?"

"Don't have the number. Everyone there was creatin' seemed like a waste of time to ask, quicker to come get. You comin or what?"

Hannibal looks at Mischa and back at Molson.

"Three minutes. Come in. Mischa could you?"

She nods, and almost hauls Molson into Hannibal and Will's kitchen. Oh boy. Three minutes. Ok. How to sell Hannibal to Mr Personality here in three minutes. Or four if she's lucky and Hannibal can't find something he wants to take with him.

"And you're sure Will is alright? And Abigail didn't get stung? What was he stung by?"

"Yeller jacks."

"Alright. I'm not familiar with them, and they are?"

"Sting worse than me."

"Ahh."

Shit, two and a half minutes.

"Can I make you some coffee?"

"None of that instant crap?"

"Not if you'd prefer not"

He frowns.

"Alright. Thanks. We got the time I guess. He gonna take long?"

He uses a tilt of his chin to indicate he means Hannibal who can just be heard opening and closing drawers and cupboard doors upstairs. Mischa twitches a smile at Molson,

"Soldier?"

"Yeah. Ok. Right. You coming?"

"Will I help or get in the way?"

He nods a little.

"Some sense in that. Maybe not. You mind? The truck's only got room for two really unless everyone's small. You're both tall."

She nods,

"Hug Abigail for me. And Will. I'll call them later. Will you tell him?"

"Sure. I guess. I can do that. I didn't know about you?"

She attends to the coffee pot and smiles at him,

"I'm here on a flying visit. Work thing. Lucky it fit with when Hannibal is here. I miss him. I'm normally based in Europe. In Brussels. European Commission?"

He nods and shrugs. More than a world away really.

"I've got ten days. And I've friends here to visit as well. And time with Abigail which is a pleasure."

"You met then?"

"Yes. Here, cream and sugar?"

"Black and one"

She doctors the drink and hands it over. He thanks her,

"Where then? You've not been here, someone would have said."

"Paris. Our parents live there. Hannibal had a conference, Will and Abigail came for a long weekend. Got snowed in a little. Met my mother and father."

"Yeah? How'd that go?"

Mischa pauses,

"I suspect Abigail was working out the advantages of having yet another set of grandparents to spoil her."

Molson laughs,

"You got that right. Where's your brother. We should go. Coffee's good though. Thanks."

"You're entirely welcome."

And she means it.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 72

Chapter Summary

That two hour truck journey? You got it.

In the bedroom Hannibal packs a couple of shirts, his wash kit, and a spare sweater. He opens and closes a few drawers, perhaps playing for time a little as he's also pretty sure that he has everything he needs. He adds the book he is currently reading and his glasses. Then he adds his phone charger. He looks at his cell, makes a small face at it.

In his and Will's bathroom he calls up Will's number,

"Hannibal? Are you alright? Hello! Hey, this is great!"

"Will! You're alright then?"

"Err. Yeah. Why wouldn't I be?"

"You were stung?"

There's a silence at the other end of the line.

"Not to be weird or anything but how exactly do you know that?"

"Molson is here."

Will exclaims sharply,

"Shit! We had no idea where he'd gone. We thought, well, he's a bit unpredictable.. why is he with you?"

"After you were stung Abigail had what he described as a 'conniption fit' and screamed a lot. My name was involved."

Will says drily,

"Did she indeed. She was upset, at first. When she thought Buster had got stung. Me? Not so much. She's seen me get stung before. How much of a fit?"

"Molson mentioned a lot of wailing."

Will sighs,

"Alright then. Nice one Abs. So, he came to you because..?"

"He's come to collect me. He decided that was the easiest and best thing to do."

“Are you coming?”

“Perhaps an opportunity not to be missed?”

Faintly Will manages,

“Oh my actual god. He's a mean driver.”

“I've experience of those.”

“His taste in music is pretty awful.”

Will pauses,

“But then, you like the theremin, so what do I know. Really? You're going to come?”

“Yes.”

“Simple as?”

“Well, I doubt that somewhat but yes. I'll see you in about two hours. Wish me luck? Oh and Mischa sends love.”

“She not coming?”

“I think she's leaving this one to me. She's holding the fort downstairs. Of which, I should hurry, this might not be the most auspicious of openers, he called her girlie. I think he thought I was having some secret assignation behind your back.”

Will laughs,

“Oh that's perfect. If you can, hug Mischa from me. I'm now going to go and have gentle words with a certain small someone who can apparently cry for Virginia at the State finals. Good luck.”

“Don't be too hard on her?”

“Tell me that again in two hours!”

Hannibal laughs quietly and they end the call. Oh Abigail.

…….

Bedelia walks around her sitting room, she picks up a book lying on her desk near the window and begins to read it. She sits in a small armchair positioned to get the natural daylight. After half a page of having taken in nothing she stops, sighs, puts it down, picks it up and marks the page and then puts it down again.

She goes into the kitchen and puts water on for coffee. As the machine burbles away she opens the fridge, a quick scan reveals that Anthony has actually left the various things she labelled ‘don't eat’ alone. Thoughtful of him. When the percolator has finished she adds some cream to her drink and goes back to the living room/study.

She stands beside the window. The grass leads down to a view of the Potomac. The sky is a spring blue and she takes a deep breath to remind herself that it's only habit and tradition that encourages people to think of Spring and new beginnings in the same moment. She's not immune to the impulse though. She glances down at her watch. Mischa should be here in the next hour.

……

Brian hands Bev a cup of coffee. She adds sugar to it. Jimmy is slumped beside her on the bench in the old fashioned diner they've stopped at on the way back to Quantico.

“No one say anything.”

All three of them sit and drink their coffee. Jack comes and joins them at the table. He'd been travelling in a different car but they'd all texted back and forth until they agreed a place to stop.

He grumbles in beside Brian.

“Don't anyone talk to me until I've drunk this coffee and eaten this, whatever it is.”

The four of them sit there despondently. The retrieval has been straightforwards but Brian thinks they actually interviewed the woman on the last pass through the area. There are no words for how that makes them feel. Jimmy gets his cell out and scrolls through his messages, he makes a small snorting sound.

“Jim, if you've anything good to share please, I'm begging you.”

Jimmy looks at his boss,

“It's just Will. He got stung by some yellow jackets.”

“Yeah? Nasty. And that's funny because?”

“Oh. No. That's not funny at all. As you say. Nasty. Good job he’s not allergic he got a couple down his shirt, hopped around some.”

The other three smile a bit, the image is a vivid one.

“Ok. That's quite funny.”

“No, no, what's funny is that Abigail decided to have a bit of a scream about it, got so worked up that Molson had a bit of an overreaction himself.”

Jack, quirks a small smile, that doesn't sound the best, but..?

“I'm not seeing it Jimmy?”

“You'll like this bit guys. She was fine by the way. But she basically screamed for Hannibal. So..”

The other three smile, yeah, ok, that's funny, but he holds up a hand,

“Not even the best bit! She made such a fuss that Molson took it on himself, without telling anyone mind you, to go and get Hannibal. Apparently they're on their way back to the Verger place right now. In Molson’s truck. Together. For two hours.”

All four of the table laugh.

“Ok. That is funny. I'd kill to be a fly on the wall for that conversation.”

…….

“Alright then Miss Graham. Give.”

Abigail looks up at her daddy, she opts for the whole look through her eyelashes and blink. It's effective when her daddy does the whole puppy dog thing and she thinks she's got it taped.

“I was scared. And then I didn't know what was happening. And everyone was making a lot of noise. And Reba was really nice to me. And grandpa asked me what I wanted so I just said ‘Hannibal’.”

Will looks at her, fair enough, some of that is pretty legitimate. And she's only eight. But, there's more to this,

“Abs? Whole story? Ok?”

She shuffles a bit, Will knows she knows she looks impossibly sweet when she does this. He waits, she glances up at him, ‘yeah, nice try’ is written all over his face, she sighs and mentally rolls her eyes a little,

“If grandpa met Hannibal I think he'd really like him. This way he gets to spend two whole hours with him.”

Will sighs,

“Ok. I can see it's not a bad plan in certain respects. But your grandpa was probably a bit scared for you. And Hannibal might have worried about both of us.”

She blinks at him some more, she hadn't entirely thought about that bit,

“Daddy? How do you know?”

“Where Molson is? Hannibal rang me. He is coming Abs. So, you better look surprised and happy when they get here and thank your grandpa a lot. And Hannibal. He might have had plans for the weekend.”

She looks shocked.

“Without us?”

Will rolls his eyes,

“I know. Without us. Hard to believe he might want or actually enjoy some down time from us isn't it. Alright. You understand why I'm a bit annoyed Abs?”

She nods. Although she still thinks it was a good plan.

“I didn't mean for you to get stung daddy. I'd just decided if anyone did anything sad I'd cry a lot.”

He looks at her and then bends down and hugs her.

“I love you. I promise to come and hear your Oscar acceptance speech when the time comes.”

She looks at him doubtfully.

……

In Molson's truck a cd of zydeco is blaring. It's not Molson's first choice but they've cycled through all the others and this is the one they've agreed on as least worst. Molson yells over the sound,

“It was from Beau. For Christmas one year. Marissa loves it. Better than your godawful noise.”

Hannibal laughs, he'd brought six cds with him as a last minute thought, considering it might be a good opener and relatively neutral territory over which to disagree. The theramin had been especially persuasive that Hannibal was in fact a human being, with, it turned out, terrible taste in music,

“Goddamit all, that's the worst thing I ever heard. What is that?”

They'd talked about the instrument and its development and Molson had begged for a change.

“Driver chooses. Really. It's a thing. Don't you know that. Maybe it's a US rule. Compulsory though. Don't they teach you nothing?”

“I am a US citizen and no I didn't have to take a test!”

“Really? Damn. You don't sound it?”

“Do you?”

“Damn! Fair enough boy. That's true.”

They'd both laughed. And switched to some Bach in the music player which Molson had frowned over through a good fifteen minutes before he said,

“I sort of like it, but it sounds too airy for me. Not enough rhythm to hit it forwards. Try this.”

He'd handed over a cd of music from the soundtrack of a movie Hannibal was faintly familiar with.

“Did the actors sing it?”

“Don't rightly know. You like it?”

“Some of it. Yes. I like the unaccompanied ones.”

“Yeah? Old time religion stuff?”

“The harmony is good.”

“Sure. Got some feel to it. Some decent emotion. You seen the movie?”

“I think so. Some base out east. Makes everyone feel homesick for a bit, in a good way. Nostalgia. Places and times that didn't exist but we all wish they did.”

Molson nods,

“I get that.”

They're both quiet then. And listen to the end of the cd. Molson switches it out for some kicking zydeco and turns the volume up a little.

“We gonna stop for me to take a leak, maybe grab a cup. There's a place I normally stop. Ok with you?”

Hannibal nods, taps his foot to the music. Really they've only half an hour to go but he understands how rituals become a thing and a stop might be useful in all kinds of ways, not least because the music is very loud.

…….

Roland looks at the three moths. He wonders if he should buy some more pupa, really he needs more if he's to have a proper breeding colony. He thinks about what his teacher had said. He makes a little face to himself, qualifications are all very well but you've got to have experience to get ahead. That month in the museum? The best month of his life. All those insects. Cataloging. Experiments. Drawers and drawers of old specimens. The smell of dust and age. Fantastic. He thinks about what he read on his laptop. That tabloid site. Really that journalist doesn't get it. Maybe he should email her?

…….

In the diner Hannibal comes back from the restroom just in time to hear Molson say to the waitress,

“I know. My son-in-law’s 'partner' he called it. Nice guy. Soldier. Active service.”

The waitress asks Molson something he doesn't catch but he hears the response,

“What can I say? Times change. You know it's been shit. My little girlie adores him.”

Hannibal joins them at the table and smiles at the waitress, she smiles back, handsome man she thinks, soldier too, why are the good ones always taken? She grins to herself, or gay, or both?

“Hey there, so, what can I get you darlin’?”

“Coffee would be good ma’am. Anything else you'd recommend?”

She dimples at him, oh he's good,

“Molson here swears by the pie. But then, he been eatin’ it for I don't know how many years. He probably forgot how any other pie should taste.”

He smiles again,

“I'll take some pie. Please. Little ice cream on the side. If you've got vanilla?”

Both Molson and the waitress beam at him, she laughs,

“You won me over boy! Pie and a side of vanilla and coffee. Molson? Anything else?”

He shakes his head,

“Nah. Thanks. I think we got this.”

She saunters off, a little swing in her step, Molson grins at Hannibal,

“Damn that girl would flirt with a bunch of pitchforks. Good job you ain't in uniform. She'd sit in your lap and sing at you.”

Hannibal smiles,

“I have no idea what that means but I'm guessing that's a good thing?”

Molson shrugs,

“You're alright.”

Hannibal laughs,

“Why sir! I believe that's a complement. And I'll take it kindly and thank you.”

Molson looks at him, and for a moment Hannibal wonders which way he'll go, and then his face eases and he laughs too,

“Yeah. Ok. I get it. Funny guy. Alright then. Last twenty minutes? I'm voting for more of the jam?”

Hannibal nods. Whatever the jam is he’ll go with it. Probably.

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 73

Chapter Notes

Mentions of moths...

Abigail looks at her grandpa, her arms are flung round his waist and she's doing the whole puppy dog thing again,

“Thank you! Thank you. I didn't know you would. I'm sorry if I scared you. I didn't mean it. I just wanted Hannibal.”

She blinks back a few tears. Will stands on the side-lines and resists rolling his eyes. Hannibal smiles at him, from where he's standing just behind Molson, so Will smiles back. Once Abigail is done grovelling to Molson she goes and buries her face in Hannibal's side. And then she does cry, for real this time.

He kneels and let's her hold him tight round the neck, her tears rolling down her face. He holds her back, gently, and rocks her very slightly. She hiccoughs a bit, and whispers,

“I'm very sorry. I know I was naughty.”

He strokes her hair and glances up at Will. Will looks torn between the genuine regret in Abigail's tone and tears and the fact that she had manipulated everyone left right and centre.

“You were. A little. Your poor grandpa.”

She nods.

“I'm sorry.”

“Alright then. Did you say sorry to your father too?”

She nods again.

“I was upset he was stung.”

“I'm sure you were. And here we are.”

He glances up at Marissa,

“Mrs Verger? I'm Hannibal Lecter, I'm sorry to impose on you like this.”

She smiles a little,

“Well, I'm pleased to meet you. Even if it was somewhat unplanned. And really the timing's not awful. You'll stay for a bit?”

Hannibal blinks, really he's got no idea what the deal is now he's here. Molson interjects,

“We got him here. Least he can do is sing for his supper. Find him somewhere to stay Marissa. Everyone’ll have to shove up. Beau’s coming tomorrow Will? Right?”

Will nods,

“Sure. To church.”

“Alright then. Ok? When we're back at our place we'll sort it all out. Will? Come and talk with me.”

It's not a question so Will leaves Abigail with Hannibal and the rest of the small group. Will is about to apologise but Molson gets there first,

“I realised what she was up to about an hour into the journey. The panic had gone worn off by then.”

Will eyes him carefully,

“But you carried on? Anyway?”

“Well yeah. If she was going to make that kind of racket? I wanted to see what the fuss was all about.”

He pauses and chews on his bottom lip,

“I apologised before. About what I said. I'm not at ease with it, but, he's ok. In general? You know? Nope. But he's ok. And I can see he's good with Abigail. Is it going to be a thing? You and him? Permanent like?”

Will nods,

“I think so. Unless anything disastrous happens.”

“Like me being a total shitwad?”

Will shrugs,

“Something like that. Molson, I should tell you, Hannibal would like to adopt Abigail. Formally. There's family stuff his side.”

“Money and shit?”

“I'm afraid so.”

“Make it easier for her?”

“In the long run. Probably a title too. European. Property as well.”

Molson nods and chews his lip a little more.

“I know I'm hard. I know it Will. But I'm practical. What we talking about?”

“A house in Paris, maybe one in Japan too. An apartment in Paris. A house here, in Baltimore. And a place in Lithuania. It's a castle.”

Molson stares at him,

“A fucking castle?”

Will nods,

“Yeah. I know. I thought he was joking at first. The titles are Italian and Lithuanian. She'll get the lot.”

“That girlie got no kids?”

“Mischa? No. Not likely either really. From what she says. And Hannibal's aunt and uncle don't have children.”

“No one else? He's got no bastards anywhere? I know he's gay. But you know. These things happen.”

“No, he's got no one else.”

“And just luck you do.”

“She adopted him first.”

Molson snorts,

“Only fair then. Yeah. I'm not wild about it. But it's your business. And I can see it'd be good for her. In the long term. What will she be? A princess?”

“Countess.”

Molson walks around and swears a fair amount. Will reckons that's fair enough. He doesn't hold his breath though it feels like one of those moments when maybe you should.

“She's keeping the ‘Verger’ name?”

Will nods,

“She would be.”

“Be one hell of a mouthful.”

Will doesn't say anything, just lets Molson chew it over.

“You told her yet?”

“No. Too many other things to deal with first.”

“Me, you mean?”

“Partly.”

“You told your pere?”

“Told him? No. I've asked him. He's talked to Hannibal too.”

“Keen?”

“Surprisingly.”

“Beau always was nicer than me. Oh I reckon you don't know it. He's been tough on you. But overall? Less of a shit. Though he's a mean drunk.”

“Six month chip. Coming up to eight now.”

“More.”

Will nods, he's not going to argue.

“Alright. I'll talk to Marissa. If she's ok, we won't get in the way.”

He pauses,

“You going to get married?”

“State of Maryland says we can. Virginia too.”

“What do you say?”

“It's likely.”

Molson nods.

“Alright. We’ll come to that as well. Give you a chance at a good start.”

Will blinks at him,

“People will see we’re on side Will. That's gonna count for something. Don't you think? Given the history?”

“I think it might. I'm..”

“Don't get mushy. I'm still getting my head round it. But the Pastor listened and said some smart things. She'd give you a church blessing, if you wanted it.”

Will smiles a little. Really? He's barely keeping up with the speed of the events unfolding.

“Ok. Thank you. Are we done here, or any more surprises you'd like to spring on me?”

Molson snorts,

“Ain't that enough for now?”

……..

Bedelia smiles when she opens the door and holds out both hands to Mischa. Perhaps a little cautiously Mischa puts down her bag and takes both of Bedelia's hands in hers.

"You're on time. I admit I'm a little surprised."

Mischa smiles a little,

"We had some excitement earlier on. I'll tell you about it."

Bedelia lets go and stoops to pick up Mischa's bag for her. Mischa follows her into the large tiled hallway, she looks around.

"Its more detached than your usual style. Isn't it?"

Bedelia looks around, as though seeing it properly for the first time in a while.

"I suppose. I've left it much as the owners left it. We may not be here for that long."

Mischa don't say anything but follows Bedelia through the house into the kitchen. Bedelia drops her bag by a large overstuffed leather covered arm-chair.

"Coffee? Or something to drink?"

"Wine would be nice?"

"Of course. White?"

"Pink. If you have it?"

Bedelia smiles at her again and goes to the fridge and chooses a bottle. She rummages in a drawer for a corkscrew and then fetches down two glasses. Mischa leans casually against one of the counter tops. Watching.

"Wills father-in-law showed up. To collect Hannibal. Abigail threw a fit this morning when Will got stung."

Bedelia raises both eyebrows,

"I hardly know where to begin. Is Will alright? Is Abigail? I liked him when we met. He seemed very kind. Very, gentle."

Mischa smiles, it's not quite a word that's occurred to her but it is true,

"He is. Especially with Abigail. He's lovely. I like him very much."

She pauses for a few moments,

"He's kind to Hannibal too. Loving. You should see Hannibal now. The difference it's made. It's a big change."

"I did see him. At that formal. You're right. He looked delighted. Very happy. Content. Surprised perhaps, and content."

Mischa smiles and accepts the glass of wine from Bedelia. She knows she's a little nervous. Probably they both are. She savours a mouthful.

“This is good. Thank you.”

Bedelia smiles back,

“And you? Are you content? Are you happy?”

Mischa puts her glass down and then takes Bedelia's from her. Bedelia raises her eyebrows again, Mischa moves closer to her, she runs her forefinger along the line of Bedelia's bottom lip before she leans in and carefully kisses her.

Bedelia makes a small noise as Mischa deepens the kiss and lifts her other hand to push gently into Bedelia's hair. She slides her hand against the grain at the base of Bedelia's skull and then pulls back a little to watch Bedelia's face.

“I want to be.”

Bedelia stretches up to kiss her again, finding her fingers at the top button of Mischa's shirt.

……..

Freddie Lounds scrolls down through the messages on her cell. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Shit. And no follow through from Jack Crawford either. Awww. Honestly if they've got stuck they should do something, anything, just to shake it up a bit. Surely? She switches to her email account. Nothing. Delete. Delete. Delete.

She stops and glances at the calendar and then the clock on the screen of the laptop she's using. Aw heck. Nothing pressing. She checks the spam folder, nothing there either. Except. She hovers over an email with an embedded jpeg. Except it's an exe Doc. So. Maybe not a jpeg. Maybe malware? She debates. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, right?

So she clicks on it.

The email opens to a picture of a beautiful yellow and brown moth. A small skull in the centre of its thorax. She gnaws at the side of her thumb a moment. Then scrolls down past the image,

>lovely isn't it? From what it was before? And now this? A perfect metamorphosis. Don't we all crave change Ms Lounds?<

Aww fuck. Is this? Could this be? She better tell Agent Crawford because even the most cursory of glances says this hasn't come through some proxy server. Fuck it. He might be really close. She jots down the sender’s email address. Really she shouldn't even have opened it. She might have already destroyed something vital. She sighs. Fuck. At least it's her laptop and not her tablet or cell. Better to do nothing else. Crawford would just go apeshit on her. Maybe there's a double layer, or a hidden link. Her tech isn't up to that kind of scrutiny.

She squints at the moth. Deaths head. That's what the bug guy called it. Stammetts. And Will Graham, when he was still on the case. Why did he come off it? She never quite got that pinned down. Fuck! The moth moves across the screen and she flaps a hand in front of her face. It's just a gif. God. That scared the wits out of her. She watches again. It's clever. The moth stays still for a

good long time and then suddenly flexes its wings and moves across the screen, a sideways scrabble. She shudders. Ugh. Moths. Why are they so much creepier than butterflies? Even without the skull?

She thinks about Jack Crawford. About the Sassy Science team. About Will Graham, and Eldon Stammetts. And this guy.

She grins. That's better.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 74

Chapter Summary

Includes part one of the Opera Weekend.

Chapter Notes

Lots of people I'd want to offer this to... anyone caught up in any of the 'natural' disasters, in contrast, anyone with a birthday this week, (yeah, you), anyone in need of something celebratory!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Miriam? Hey, it's Frankie. You alright?”

Miriam smiles into her cell, Frankie is a sweetie and their slightly rubbish attempts at being in touch to sort out a meet up has gradually coalesced around the forthcoming weekend when Abigail is entertained whilst her ‘dads’ go to the opera.

“Franks! Excellent. I was thinking of you. Have you sorted out stuff for the weekend?”

“Yup. Kind of. Abigail is with Molly? Beverly Katz’s partner, wife, girlfriend, I dunno? Anyway. Abs was supposed to spend Saturday afternoon with Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller, but some case thing has them stuck in the back of beyond.”

“Ok. So we get her on Saturday and they get her Sunday?”

“That's the current theory. I don't know what difference a day makes but they've been looking forwards to it. I think it involves antiquing?”

“Really? With Abigail?”

“I know. But apparently she eggs on Dr Price into making terrible purchases, and then colludes with Dr Zeller over how to get rid of them!”

Miriam laughs,

“Alright! So. Our plans?”

“The Colonel has given us a budget. Which is excellent as so has Will.”

“And you didn't tell either of them?”

Frankie laughs,

“What? You think I should have?”

…….

Jack Crawford sighs. A lot. Freddie tries not to look smug. Frederick Chilton and Eldon Stammetts sit round the table too. Devon the press guy grins at her. Jack tries,

“And you had nothing before this?”

Freddie shakes her head,

“Not from this guy. You any further on?”

She glances at Brian and Jimmy, but it's Bev who answers,

“Our tech guys have looked. What's weird is that it's not encrypted or mucked around with in any way. Guy goes into a library and sends an email. It's true it's a new account and this is the only email from it. Oh and thanks for not replying. But nothing more elaborate as subterfuge.”

“Which is either really smart or as naive as hell. And the library?”

Bev shrugs and looks at Jack, he nods at Brian,

“They don't have cctv. They're a not very well funded small town library. Their worst problem is kids pinching the graphic novels. And even they usually get brought back. The time stamp on the email is unfortunately one of their busiest times of the week. Lots of kids in, they have a beginners IT class, it's a local market day so they get people dropping in their weekly library loan, and there's some kind of club for people seeking work. Oh and an AA meeting in one of the rooms. The librarian estimated maybe a couple of hundred people.”

Frederick asks,

“Anyone stand out to him or her?”

“They get visitors coming through. There’s some kind of antique fair once a month and it was that day. The library had a display of prints. They had people coming and going all day long.”

“So again, either really smart or just lucky?”

“Yeah. Shit isn't it?”

Freddie frowns,

“So, what next? I don't imagine you got me here just for my sharp shoes and smart mouth?”

Jack glances at Frederick.

“You're right. We didn't. We do want you to contact him.”

“Oh. I get it. You've got stuff you want me to say, right? Of course you do. Birthday present still the same?”

Jack nods resignedly.

“No changes Ms Lounds. You up for it?”

…….

Abigail grins at her father,

“I've packed everything. Do you want to check? And I promise to be good and do what everyone says. You won't have to worry.”

Will sits on the edge of her bed Abigail snuggled down into the comforter. Tentacles just poking out of the top.

“I know I was naughty at Grandpa and Grandma’s house but I said sorry and I meant it. Really.”

Will nods. The rest of the weekend had gone off quietly and enjoyably. Molson was clearly making an effort and when they'd all eaten Sunday lunch there had been a certain amount of tiptoeing around but it had come good.

When Hannibal left on the Sunday evening with Mason, ready to go to work on the Monday everything seemed to have reached a new equilibrium. Beau had clapped Molson on the back,

“Not such a bastard after all then?”

Molson had frowned,

“Yeah. Don't tell everyone. I've got a reputation.”

Abigail blinks at her father and dials back on the grinning,

“Is Bev going to be back?”

“Not sure. We've switched out days for Preller. It'll be Frankie and Miriam on Saturday and maybe Brian and Jimmy Sunday. Ok?”

“What about Aunty Mischa?”

“Maybe Sunday evening. And you get her all next weekend too.”

Abigail smiles and then frowns.

“Hannibal will be gone then.”

Will nods. There's no getting around it. Hannibal will have gone back by then.

“Yup. But Monday to Thursday? We own that man. Ok? Lots of fun things planned? Have you done drawings and things for him to take back?”

Abigail wiggles a bit,

“Not enough. I'm going to ask Molly to help me.”

“Good. Sounds like a plan.”

She makes a small discontented face,

“He's coming back though?”

“Yes. We think six months. And then it should be permanent.”

She nods. In six months she will have adopted Hannibal for more than a year.

“Can we have an anniversary party? For adopting him?”

Will smiles,

“That's sounds great, it could be a one year and a welcome home party all rolled into one.”

She smiles back happily,

“And a wedding party?”

Will smiles,

“Ok. When Hannibal comes back permanently we’ll all talk about it. Maybe that's what we’ll do.”

“I think you will.”

“Well. Let's see if you’re right then. In six month’s time.”

She nods, she's getting used to not pushing on this, just reminding her daddy that she hasn't forgotten. Maybe she should remind Hannibal too? In a picture. For him to look at when he goes back to his base?

……

“Will? Have you got everything?”

Will sticks his head round the bathroom door into their bedroom.

“Almost. I can't find, oh, wait I remember.”

He disappears again and a few minutes later comes out of the bathroom with his wash kit. Hannibal sits on the bed and watches him finish packing.

“Suit?”

“Yup. And bow tie. In the carrier. With a decent shirt. Good shoes are in the bag.”

Hannibal nods.

“Thank you. Have you got everything now?”

He pauses, he's tried to think of any way he can to get Will to bring his passport but he hasn't found a plausible idea yet that won't raise eyebrows and questions. And an extensive but quiet look for it

the last two evenings hasn't helped in the slightest. After all, Will must have one, there was all the fuss about getting one in time for Paris.

Will smiles at Hannibal. This is pretty exciting. Now that Abigail's off at school and they're actually packing? He's trying to keep a lid on it but he's both a bit apprehensive and excited. Hannibal looks mostly calm. But Will can see there's a tremor of something running through the stillness. Like a tiny thread of spun gold that catches the light now and again. Just enough to draw your attention, hold it, and make you seek it again.

The only thing that's frustrating is that Will hasn't been able to find Hannibal's passport. He's tried all the obvious places. And the less obvious ones. It could be in his briefcase? Can he persuade Hannibal to bring it without it seeming too weird? Maybe he carries it as ID as a matter of course? And he's running out of time. Really they should be going soon.

“Ok. I think I've got everything. Time for a coffee or tea before we go?”

Hannibal smiles,

“If you're as thrilled as I am to finally be going perhaps we might get something en route?”

Will grins and then pulls Hannibal to his feet,

“The sooner we leave, the sooner we're there?”

Hannibal puts both arms loosely round Will’s neck.

“So clever. So concise. So finally packed?”

“Alright. I get it. Kiss me first?”

Hannibal complies and tries hard not to be too carried away by the shot of longing and lust it ignites, he breathes hard against Will’s neck,

“Or we could just stay here. No one would know.”

Laughing Will breaks away,

“Nice try. I know you want the Opera and the full works!”

“And you don't?”

“I totally do!”

…….

Hannibal gently lays a hand on Will’s thigh,

“There's nothing we can do. I should have anticipated the traffic.”

Will frowns,

“It's totally my fault. I live here all the time. I should have thought if it.”

“We could try the radio, see if there's been an accident up ahead?”

Will spends a few minutes fiddling with the radio of the Bentley. Eventually they hit some talk radio with local weather and road updates. They listen and then resign themselves to upwards of an hour's delay.

“I feel like we should play some car games to distract ourselves?”

“I'm not Abigail.”

Will wriggles around in his seat to face Hannibal,

“Well duh. Ok. I'm used to distracting myself that way too. Sorry. It's making me tetchy.”

Hannibal squeezes his thigh again,

“Surely you must have practice of unsatisfactory waiting?”

“Unsatisfactory hanging around waiting for scenes, or results, or to give evidence. But that's all purposeful.”

“And this isn't?”

Will makes a grumbly noise and Hannibal glances at him,

“Yeah alright. Busted. It is purposeful. But usually, there's a difference kind of anticipation going on? This is different.”

Hannibal doesn't say anything. He doesn't really need to. Will switches the radio to a light classical station. He sits back in his seat. He can't change it, he'll just have to put up with it. Hannibal looks at him again. There's nothing to be done about it. And it hadn't even occurred to him.

They arrive at the hotel almost two hours later than they'd planned. Will is utterly annoyed with himself about it, more than Hannibal had expected. He rarely sees a grumpy Will. Not like this.

Once the bellhop has brought in their bags, shown off the room, gracefully accepted a tip and scampered, perhaps aware there's a bit of a mood, Hannibal pulls Will to him.

“What is it? You're not happy? Was it the journey? Is it something else? What can I do?”

Will rests his head on Hannibal's shoulder. He mumbles into it,

“Don't be mad.”

“I'm not mad. I'm a bit concerned. Will, my darling, what is it.”

Will pulls away and sits on the edge of the bed and pats it.

“Come and sit and I’ll explain. What's the time?”

Hannibal sits and then looks at Will’s face, he looks sad and resigned, he looks at his watch,

“It's just before six. Why?”

“Ok. Close your eyes and hold out your hand.”

Hannibal frowns and does so. Will puts something small and velvety into it.

“Ok. Open them.”

Hannibal looks down into his hand, a small velvet covered box. He looks a question at Will.

“Open it.”

He does. Two rings. Two wedding rings.

“Will?”

“Ok. So I had this plan. You know I said no elopement last week? Well, I thought maybe this week. But, I couldn't find your passport this morning. And in New York you have to register 24 hours in advance and the office closes at 5:30pm. So. I'm just annoyed with myself. I should have told you. Then we could have got here on time. And if you wanted, we could have got married on Monday.”

Hannibal blinks at him, he tilts the two rings out, they're plain, with just a simple design chased round the edges. He suddenly laughs,

“It's not funny Hannibal. I'm so pissed.”

“It is Will. It really is. Try my left pocket.”

Will frowns, and then his face clears,

“Oh my god.”

He dips his hand into Hannibal's left hand jacket pocket and brings out a small polished wooden box.

“Open it. I couldn't find your passport this morning either. And can I say I searched the entire house!”

“It was in my bag.”

“As is mine. I'm afraid I had the exact same thoughts.”

“We won't have time here?”

“We won't. And Washington requires 48 hours. And I can't miss Tuesday.”

“Baltimore is 48 hours too. I checked. New York was the best bet by far. These are nice.”

He looks down at the rings in his hand, also quite plain but with a single design engraved around the centre.

“We didn't give ourselves enough time to elope.”

“But you wanted to?”

Will looks at him,

“Very much.”

Hannibal picks up Will’s left hand and slides one of the rings onto it.

“Then I consider that we did. The formal bit just comes later.”

Will looks up at him,

“Did I say I love you? Because I do.”

Hannibal smiles and leans forward to kiss him.

“I like the sound of that.”

…….

Chapter End Notes

> Yeah. Sorry about slow posting. Shit migraine last couple of days. But! In better news I am now going to fannibal fest in Toronto. Anyone planning on going please dm me on twitter or tumblr or leave me a comment. I'm as shy as a shy thing and it'd be nice to know I'll have friends there...

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 75

Chapter Summary

Opera Weekend part 2

Lots of this chapter nsfw!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I'm sorry. I suppose I feel like I fucked this up somehow. You Know? I shouldn't have tried to rush it. Well. I guess, we both did.”

Will stops and looks at Hannibal with a mixture of regret and ‘forgive me I'm an idiot’ on his face.

Hannibal stokes a finger down the side of his jaw and leans in and kisses the corner of Will’s mouth.

“Then we are both guilty of the same thing. And it would have been a lot of fun. I'm afraid I might have tipped off both Mischa and Miss Bloom. I thought we'd need a witness and I wouldn't want Abigail to miss her father getting married.”

Will interjects,

“Fathers. But I take the point. Actually I spoke to Miss Bloom too. And not Mischa, I should have thought of that. I've got Bev and Preller kind of on standby.”

The two men look at each other and gradually they both smile a bit more.

“We are both the best kind of idiots! Hannibal. God. Miss Bloom! I'll have some explaining to do. Or we both will! Look. This weekend? It's still going to be memorable. Right? For reasons we might not share with all our friends. But memorable.”

Hannibal laughs,

“Not even Bev?”

Will looks at him and let's a small smile play round his mouth.”

“Not even Bev.”

Slowly Hannibal nods,

“Alright then. Shall we keep each other's rings, as a promise of a promise? And start our weekend again?”

Will stands up from the bed and smiles down at his almost-but-not-quite-husband-to-be and reaches out a hand.

“Let’s go down to the lobby have a small drink and then come back up as a start over?”

“Let’s.”

……..

Freddie looks at Frederick and Devon the FBI press guy. She makes a face. She looks back down at the text they've almost but not quite agreed on.

“You think you can push him to make him visible but not to kill again?”

“That's what we're hoping. He's already made a mistake contacting you.”

She nods. It's kind of amateur. Which the kills don't seem to be. They seem to be organised and efficient and if not clever at least the perp has done enough to utterly cover his tracks.

“You don't think this is someone else? Muscling in? Wanting the attention?”

Frederick pauses and he and Devon exchange glances. Freddie doesn't know that the team also seems to have a stalker, and they'd rather keep it that way. She's better in the dark on this. If there's the faintest chance there's some kind of connection? Well, better to keep her out as long as possible. Though the pathology of the two crimes is pretty different. So why there should be a connection Frederick can't pinpoint. It's just that something is nagging at him.

“We thought about that. Of course that might be so. In which case if we can draw them out and exclude them? You get the idea?”

She shrugs,

“Of course. Alright then. I'll run it. See if we can shake the tree just a little. Right? You get Dr Stammetts to talk me through the bit about the bugs. That doesn't seem quite right just yet? Ok?”

Devon grins,

“He likes you. I think you listened really well. Can't be too many people who pay attention to his kind of talk. Him and Will Graham? Hilarious. Last Christmas party? Really. On and on. Droned.”

He pauses,

“Ok that was meant to be a joke, it's a type of bee.”

Frederick and Freddie exchange glances and say nothing.

“Suit yourself.” Devon grumbles.

……

“Better?”

“God. Yes. Fuck. Hannibal!”

The shower is large, with a rainforest shower head and side jets. Half an hour of mucking around and teasing has now settled into Hannibal alternating between fingering Will open whilst he swallows around his cock.

Will leans on the side of the stall. Both hands spread at shoulder width, Hannibal kneeling between his legs, as he struggles to catch his breath. As Hannibal swallows around him and grazes his prostate at the same time he gasps and can't stop himself from arching forwards harder into Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal hums and looks up at Will. Wills eyes are closed, water cascading down his face. He looks utterly undone. Hannibal pulls off slightly,

“More?”

Will is unable to come up with anything coherent so Hannibal smiles and turns him to face more against the firmest wall of the shower,

“Lean a bit more, widen your stance. Alright?”

Will shudders as Hannibal pulls his fingers out but he's not prepared for Hannibal's long broad lick against him. All the way from that soft tender spot behind his balls up over his hole and flicking up at the end. He moans. Hannibal laughs against him and gets to work with his tongue.

Usually Will simply admires Hannibal for his clever language, his voice, his modulation, timbre, and tone. Now though? All the other things Hannibal's tongue is capable of. And the sucking. The nibbling. The pressing. The fucking. He keeps his hands on the wall and lets his cock hang heavy between his legs. He won't come like this. Probably. But it'll be a close thing. When Hannibal adds one of his thumbs to the mix Will starts in on a high note of desperate enjoyment. God. With the almost hot water still soaking them both. Hannibal's warm hand spreading him, his other hand working him and his tongue. God. Maybe he could come from this?

…….

Molly looks across the table at Abigail.

“Alright girlie?”

Abigail nods and then takes a big gulp of juice from her favourite Hello Kitty mug that she keeps at Bev and Molly’s house.

“Can we draw some pictures later?”

“We can. What do you want to draw? Is it homework?”

“No. I have got some. Just some math and a story. But I want to draw some things for Hannibal to take back. I brought all the little things.”

Molly raises both eyebrows?

“Little things?”

“From the things we went to. Like the Opera? I've got the ticket. And a napkin form the diner we had cake in. Those sorts of things. Shall I show you?”

Molly nods and smiles, Abigail is a poppet and so gone on Hannibal it's kind of adorable, even though it will probably be hell when he goes back to base in a week's time. Molly sighs. Less than a week now. And if Abigail hates it? How's Will going to be? Also as miserable as sin she's pretty sure.

Abigail comes back with a small paper bag and upends it on the table, a few tickets, a receipt from a shop, a drawing, two napkins with logos. Three pressed flowers, two pressed leaves. Small and green and tender. Two feathers. Little things that would normally be discarded or recycled and here Abigail is hoarding them carefully. Tiny treasures.

Molly smiles,

“I'll tell you what. We could make a little book for him? With a nice cover? We could kind of sew it together with ribbon? And stick everything in? Like the story of your time here together? How about that?”

She knows she's hit the nail on the head when she sees Abigail's shining eyes. Breathily the little girl laughs,

“Oh yes! He'd love that! Thank you Molly!”

Alright then. After supper. You going to eat that mac-n-cheese?”

Abigail nods enthusiastically.

“I love Pasta!”

…….

Will gasps. Struggles to catch his breath, barely awake, two fingers already opening him. He looks back over his shoulder, Hannibal kneeling between his spread legs, fisting his own cock, an intent look on his face.

“Am I awake?”

“Shhh.. you don't need to be. Just enjoy this.”

Will watches Hannibal watch him and gradually loses himself in the rhythm of Hannibal stroking himself and twisting his fingers in Will’s arse. Hannibal watches Will let go into the pleasure of what he is doing. When he adds a third finger Will makes a noise that Hannibal records in his mind. Ready to be replayed to accompany the sight of Will arching back against him. He's not done yet.

He takes the time to add some extra lube to his own cock and sees Will widen his legs in anticipation. Instead of pressing forwards though he bends and kisses and then licks around his own fingers and Wills response is as though he's been electrified. Hannibal sucks and tongues and licks and Will no longer has access to any of his vocabulary. When Will doesn't stop himself from grinding back against Hannibal's fingers and mouth he slides a hand round and squeezes at Wills cock.

“I think we now know that the addition of some rimming to our repertoire is a guaranteed plus.”

Will pants,

“Shut up. You're far too composed. For gods sake.”

Hannibal laughs,

“That was a coherent sentence. I'm obviously not working hard enough.”

He settles back between Will’s legs and relishes the meal before him. Will is always so amazingly responsive to his touch and right now, with no responsibilities hanging over him? With no one to over hear or at least no one to care about if they overhear they seem to have reached a new peak of mutual need and satisfaction and intimacy. Close enough already that either of them could admit a discomfort and close enough that right now everything is working between them. Hannibal reflects for just a moment that with one or two falters along the way they have moved steadily together and closer ever since they met.

Since before they met.

He feels Will twist under him, and smiles. This usually means Will now desperately wants to be fucked. Wonderful.

……

Miriam and Frankie stand on the doorstep of Molly and Bev’s house, when Miriam reaches out and presses the doorbell she glances back at Miriam and suddenly has an idea,

“Miriam? Would you be one of most bridesmaids? I've got my sister, and we're gonna ask Abigail. I'd love it if you would. It'd be good for Tobes too? Would you?”

Miriam looks at her and blinks hard, wow, not expected at all.

“Frankie? Really? Are you? I mean? I’ve never been one. Really?”

Frankie nods,

“Really. I mean it. It'd be great. You can wear your uniform if you like. Doesn't have to be a dress.”

Miriam searches her face, this is? This is? Amazing! Fantastic.

“I'm kind of speechless. Really Frankie? Really? I'd love it? And I'll wear a drsss if you really want me to!”

Frankie bursts out laughing,

“Oh my god! I just knew you were the right person to ask. God. That's amazing. Brilliant. Thank you. Thank you. Tobias will be so pleased. I think he's gonna ask the Colonel to be best man. I'm not sure. But I think so. God. Thank you.”

She leans in and hugs Miriam tightly. Miriam is still surprised. More so when she realises she's crying. And laughing.

“Did you ring the bell?”

“I thought you did!”

When Molly answers the door the two women are still hugging and laughing and maybe crying a little.

“Ok. Well. Not what I expected. Hello Frankie and Miriam. Come in ladies. I think there's a story here?”

…….

Will hums to himself as he lets the room service guy in with breakfast. He tips the guy, pleased that it's not the bellhop from last night, that he thinks he might have been slightly grumpy to. He feels a bit bad about that. As for the rest he doesn't feel bad about that at all. Maybe a little sore. In the best way. Already. And god. It's only just before 11 am.

He counts in his head. He's already come three and a half times. The half only because, God, forty is a fond memory and his refractory period isn't what it was. He smiles to himself. What even was his refectory period? They've had more sex since they arrived here last night than he'd even had in his entire life before he met Hannibal.

He pauses. That's, well, that's really something. He wonders if Hannibal has thought of it? He’ll mention it later. In the meantime almost certainly Hannibal will appreciate coffee, some brunch and then some serious fellatio. Will grins. Some of those at least could be combined. Maybe not the coffee and oral sex though, he's not sure a dousing in hot coffee is his idea of foreplay.

Chapter End Notes

Slow posting. Sorry. More moving of books and stuff. Slightly depressed partner. Slightly needy elderly father. PMT.

Enough excuses?

Thank you to everyone who has left comments. And kudos.

And oh look. A whole chapter! I won't promise another one Today or even tomorrow. But this week.

Also posting this week

Tuesday: The Lighthouse chapter 5/20
Wednesday: Upon the Chaos chapter 1 (new Hannibal/Will AU seven chapters)
Today: The Gathering Light chapter 7/25 (Foyle's War/Hannibal crossover AU)
Thursday: Mr Zeller and Dr Price and the Curse of the Mummy chapter 15/30

Adopt a Soldier AU - Part 76

Chapter Notes

For EvertonEm and VixSpes.

Eldon Stammetts, Will’s bug guy friend at the Smithsonian makes a face and then starts in on correcting the text that Freddie Lounds has sent him. Ok she's going for maximum coverage but some of her assertions are just plain wrong.

“Randall? Hey? Randy? Where are you? Any chance of a coffee?”

Eldon’s most favourite and long lasting post doc student tips his head round the corner of a stack of shelves,

“Hey Dr E, coffee? Sure. That'd be great thanks.”

Eldon rolls his eyes,

“Very good. Nice try. Cream one sugar!"

His assistant laughs and is about to push off when he sees what his boss is working on,

“Is this the I-70 case? Shit isn't it? The moth business? What a terrible thing.”

“I've been thinking about it you know? Why this moth?”

“Maybe just the imagery. The skull’s head? As simple as.”

“Yes. I wondered that. But that about the rest of it. Maybe it's to do with the chrysalis? They're always found at cocoon stage, no mature specimens at all. They think the guy got in touch with the journalist.”

“The one who came here? Wow. Ok. That's a bit stupid. Surely they can track him?”

“I know. But apparently not. Mix of dumb luck and bravado from what little I've heard.”

Randall sighs,

“I like Will Graham. He's a friend of yours isn't he?”

“Well sure. I've known him for years. And his former wife.”

“Oh. I didn't know he was married. Or used to be. I'd sort of thought he was gay, maybe.”

His boss looks at him a little closer,

“Randall?”

“Yeah ok. I had a bit of a crush on him. He was nice. When he came last year. I saw him a fair bit. I thought. Well. You know.”

Eldon shakes his head.

“He's got a little girl. She's eight. And he was married but his wife died. A few years ago.”

He pauses,

“She was probably murdered. It was a very bad time. Margot was a friend of mine too. From College. I actually introduced them.”

He doesn't mention the regret he feels about that, even though it bothers him some,

“Anyway. I'm sorry. If I'd known I'd have had you both round or something. He's great. But I'm afraid to say he's met someone since he was here last year.”

Randall makes a small scrunched up face in disappointment,

“Really? Damn. He didn't say anything the last couple of times he dropped by. He was really friendly actually. I thought. Well, I thought he was just happy and he was pleased to be here.”

Eldon nods,

“Shit. I'm sorry. Last time he was here his partner had just arrived from some base out in the Middle East. He's a soldier.”

Randall blinks, well that's a big pile of fuck all then.

“Ok. I get it. Well at least I didn't make a complete idiot of myself! Actually some of the kids kind of threw themselves at him or maybe I'd have been a bit more forwards.”

“Did they now? Because he’s such a sweet guy, or because he's cute, or because of the bugs do you think? Or that he's a proper federal agent and all?”

Randall shrugs,

“It's a hot combo. I'll get the coffee. And thanks. For making sure I didn't make a fool of myself. I'm glad you told me.”

Eldon nods and gets back to the screen and Freddie’s mangling, Randall slopes off for the coffee.

Well dammit.

…….

As they sit on the edge of the bed Will leans on Hannibal as he opens the Valentine's Day care package that he and Abigail sent. Hannibal pulls out Abigail's parcel first. Inside is a very sweet drawing of her and the two dogs all holding up paper hearts with Hannibal written on them. He smiles,

“I'm not sure we can count on Buster’s devotion but it's very nice of her all the same. At least she has it right! Even if the dog doesn't.”

“It's ok though? Now he thinks you're my bitch?”

Hannibal looks at Will who simply smirks back. Inside the envelope is another picture of Will and Hannibal with Abigail in the middle. There's a great big heart drawn around them all made of smaller hearts. He smiles again,

“I'm sure I can find a frame for this. I'll take it back with me.”

Will nods,

“Good she'd like that. Now the other one. I think there's two pictures, as well as the February quote.”

He pauses to let Hannibal open the envelope and fish out the tiny pictures and calling card quote. Will leans on him a little more and ghosts a kiss over the corner of his jaw. Just a gentle press of lips.

“Can you see?”

“It's a triple mirror? That we're looking in?”

Will nods,

“Lucky there's one here. Isn't it?”

“I haven't forgotten about the other things.”

Will raises both eyebrows,

“Oh yes? Remind me?”

Hannibal turns his head and presses a kiss more firmly against Will’s mouth, he holds the cards lightly in his hands as Will opens his mouth a little and Hannibal pushes in with his tongue. Will puts his hands on either side of Hannibal face and kisses him harder. Hannibal swallows and pulls back a little, let's Will chase the kiss,

“Let me put these down. And then? Mirror? Prostate? You remember? My fingers, your arse, we were going to see if you could come from that alone? Or the whole languid fuck and suck?”

Will takes the cards from him,

“I had forgotten that. Although I guess the second picture is sort of that. Hannibal? Really? Anything. Everything? Maybe save the prostate thing for later. In case it's a bit..”

“Overwhelming?”

Will smiles,

“Yes. Overwhelming. Maybe the mirror now? Would that be alright?”

Hannibal smiles at him,

“Of course. Better than alright. Perfect in fact.”

Will swallows and reaches out a hand for the tie of Hannibal's robe.

“You know we've had more sex in this hotel room than I'd ever had in my life before I met you.”

He says it without fanfare or emphasis but Hannibal looks at him, frowns for just a passing moment and then almost throws himself on top of Will on the bed. Will laughs but Hannibal is serious when he says,

“You will never.” He punctuates every short comment with urgent kisses and strokes to Will’s face and throat, “never, have that.” Will groans when Hannibal bites down his neck and across his shoulder “experience of absence again. Never.” When they're both undressed once more neither of them remember the mirror card or what was depicted there simply forgetting themselves in the claim of each other.

……..

Jimmy yawns so widely you could drive a whole fleet of FBI vehicles through it,

“I am so, so, so, tired.”

Brian waves Bev off through the window of the SUV. She manages a lift of her hand but not much more. Cassie is still driving and doing a good enough job of it though she looks exhausted too.

“I know. Nearly home. Cassie? You taking the van back? I can come? Our car’s at the lab?”

She turns a tired eye to him as she starts the engine again,

“I'd really appreciate it. There's so much to log in. Do you mind Dr Z?”

“Not a problem. We're all flattened. Least we can do is help each other out. Jim? Should we drop you?”

Jimmy looks seriously torn, but he sighs,

“With three of us it'll go faster. Even if one of them is my sorry excuse for an arse. I can at least make some coffee if we flag. Ok. When I flag. I'm flagging now. Brian, we might need a taxi later? Ok?”

Brian nods,

“Ok Cass. Back to the lab. Don't spare the horses. God. I must be knackered that's what Will says. Shit. We've got Abigail tomorrow. Damn. What time Jim?”

“Half two, I think? Yeah. Time for something of a lie in.”

“I could sleep until Easter. Shit. It is Easter.”

“Is it? Where's my damn egg then Brian? Shit did we get one for Abigail?”

“Back at home.”

Jimmy sighs,

“I love you Brian Zeller.”

Brian winks at Cassie who smiles a little,

“I know.”

“You're no Han Solo!”

“Whereas you Jim are certainly Princess Leia.”

…….

Freddie Lounds mulls over the email she's had back from Dr Stammetts. Ok, he's been a bit of a diva about the whole moth species business but whatever. Nothing she can't work with. And the transformation angle he's emphasised is a good one. Ok. Ok.

She makes a few changes and then uploads the new article, some images and maybe even a few prayers to the gods of misrule that this will stir things in the right way. Change huh? Let's see what the guy has to say about this.

…….

Bev almost drags herself into her house, along the hall and into the kitchen at the rear, she goes she drops her jacket, a scarf, her bag, her keys, all on the floor, too tired really to care even if usually she's the neat freak round the place.

“Babe? Kill me now I'm so tired, I think. Oh Abs! Hey, errr. I had actually forgotten you'd be here. Sorry sweetie.”

Abigail smiles up at Bev,

“that's alright, I only just got here. I've had the whole afternoon with Private Lass and Frankie. I've had too much sugar and Molly says I'm overexcited.”

Bev drops into tone of the seats and slumps, she looks up at Molly,

“Really? That sounds just awesome? Was there cake and did you bring me any?”

Abigail smiles very widely,

“How did you know? Three kinds!”

“Really? That's amazing. I was kind of joking. Though it's the best kind of news. Did you have a good time?”

Abigail nods enthusiastically,

“We did. And now I'm drawing more pictures for Hannibal to take back with him. And a card for Frankie. I'm going to be her bridesmaid with her sister and Private Lass. She's going to get me a new dress!”

Bev laughs,

“Alright. That's pretty good. Aren't you being Jimmy and Brian’s flower girl too?”

Abigail nods again,

“Yes I am! Two dresses.”

Bev looks at Molly,

“You heard anything from Will?”

Molly smiles easily at her, and gets up from the table to find the wine and some glasses and to put the kettle on, she knows what Bev will want.

“Not a thing. Must mean they're having a good time. They'll be at the Opera right now won't they?”

Bev glances at the clock, shit, when did it get this late?

“They will. So. Nothing at all?”

Molly shakes her head. They'd both wondered what Will had meant when he'd casually asked if they might be free Monday afternoon, but maybe whatever it was hasn't come together quite.

“Ok? Please. I beg you. A glass of wine and some tea and something to eat?”

“Coming right up. And by the way I'm still keeping count of how much you owe me!”

Bev groans,

“I know it. I'll pay you back. One day. With interest. Maybe on our honeymoon?”

Molly and Abigail both look at Bev,

“What? What did I say? Oh. Shit. Oh. Right.”

Abigail looks at her hard,

“Beverly! Ask her, ask her, ask her!”

Molly laughs,

“I don't think Bev's even thinking of it. Everyone else is though. Nice try Abigail. Tea, Bev?"

Bev looks at her,

“Actually. I'm not so against the idea. If you'd like?”

Molly turns and looks at her,

“You're kidding? Right?”

Bev blushes, Abigail looks between them,

“I'll close my eyes if you like? If it's private?”

Molly looks at Bev,

“Are you asking?”

“Would you say yes if I did?”

“If you asked.”

“Alright then. I'm asking.”

They hardly hear the squeal of delight.

“Three! Three! Three!”

When they both surface from a hasty kiss Bev sighs,

“I don't even have a ring for you. I'm sorry, I have been thinking about it.”

Molly smiles,

“Not to worry. You've got terrible taste.”

“Except in women.”

Molly smiles.

“Of course.”

Adopt a Soldier AU - Part 77

Chapter Summary

A night at the opera!

Lots NSFW

If you want a really fantastic full on night at the opera with Hannibal and Will Hannibalsimago and purplesocrates wrote one called 'music wove us on its patterning loom', they capture raunch really rather well. I think I've managed a link in the notes...

Chapter Notes

http://archiveofourown.org/works/11743227

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Enjoying it?”

“Very much. I liked the matinee version as well.”

Hannibal glances round the auditorium. He'd faintly thought about a private box but in the end had opted for a simple pair of tickets in a decent part of the concert hall at the New York Metropolitan Opera House. He smiles,

“Perhaps when I come back we might get a season ticket? A family one?”

Will turns and looks at him, squeezes his hand a little.

“I really enjoy every time you commit even a little bit. It's perfect. I love it.”

He shifts in his chair,

“And can I just say I ache. In the best kind of way. Otherwise I'd be suggesting a stall at the next interval.”

Hannibal raises an eye brow at him,

“A stall?”

“Men's bathrooms downstairs. One of the stalls has three solid walls and a down to ground partition wall. It's for wheelchair users but if it was empty, well, you know?”

Hannibal smiles slightly and raises both eyebrows, just a little, it makes Will smile some more, especially when Hannibal asks,

“I thought exhibitionism was not your preferred mode?”

Will grins a bit,

“It's not really. But the room is pretty solid. And during an interval? Or just before it? I wondered about that? Or at the end of it? I looked at the schematics, they're on line.”

Hannibal blinks at him, he glances round, not entirely sure how much time they have left in this first interval,

“I'm going to go and look. I'll be back in a few moments. One floor down?”

Will nods and Hannibal gives him a look of such intense possessiveness that he can't regret mentioning it. As Hannibal pushes himself along the line of partly filled and partly empty seats he smirks a bit to himself. The rest rooms at the New York Opera? Really? To add to that truck stop, bay six floor five, and that gateway? And maybe he is a bit sore? But hell? How often will they do this. Maybe it's not so bad an idea after all. He raises both eyebrows at Hannibal when he returns a few minutes later, just as the lights are going down. Hannibal leans over and whispers quietly,

“The bathroom is emptying fast. I think we might manage something. You're right about the walls. Very solid.”

“Really? We might be back a bit late?”

Hannibal squeezes Will’s hand,

“Is that a challenge?”

Through the whole of the next act Hannibal holds Will’s hand, between them, on the armrest, just rubbing a circle on the back of it with his thumb. It kind of drives Will to distraction. Just before the next interval begins Hannibal squeezes his hand harder and clearly makes ‘ready-to-leave? once the curtain has come down' movements. As everyone begins applauding they look at each other.

“Now?”

Will looks up at Hannibal through his eyelashes, nods.

“Yes. Now.”

…….

The rest-rooms at the New York Metropolitan Opera House aren't the most luxurious Will has ever seen, but they're far from the seediest either. The tiles are a sort of aqua colour and the accents a lovely dark red. All of the pipe work and taps are a sparkling chrome. The room is deserted when they arrive.

Will looks at Hannibal,

“Not too late to back out. Really?”

“Really.”

They close and lock the door of the stall farthest from the main door. And when they turn and look at each other it's not about the rest rooms of the Opera House, or even that they're both doing something slightly against their own particular grain, or preferences, but simply that they're doing something, to remember, together.

“I brought wipes. For the wall. Let me.”

Hannibal has to stifle a laugh when Will quickly wipes the wall down. It comes off mostly clean but he smiles a little,

“I like this suit. I don't want it covered in random men’s rest room… Actually forget that thought. I like this suit.”

“And you're the one going to be pressed against the wall?”

“I think so? You're bigger than me. Stronger too.”

“Is that right?”

Hannibal steps in closer and Will smiles up at him. There's only a couple of inches in it between them but that's enough.

“It is. Right now it is.”

He leans up a little as Hannibal leans down and kisses him. The kissing turns deep and sensuous, fast. They both know what the other likes and neither of them hold back. Will bites Hannibal's bottom lip gently. Hannibal swipes across Will’s tongue with his own. When Hannibal palms the front of Will’s trousers, Will has to bite back the sound he almost makes. Hannibal's voice dips lower, clearly roughened,

“Turn round.”

Will doesn't pause but does as he's asked. Leans against the wall, his hands at shoulder height, his feet spread a little apart. Hannibal reaches round his waist and carefully undoes Will’s belt and zip. And shoves both pants and underwear down in one go. Will shudders. He reaches higher and loosens Will’s tie and then undoes the first two buttons of Will’s shirt. He leans in closer and murmurs into the back of Will’s neck,

“Did you bring..”

Will shivers, just a little, from the thrill of it,

“Condoms. Jacket pocket. So neither of us would drip everywhere. Lube. Also in jacket pocket. Ok?”

Hannibal nods against the sweet spot he has found under the edge and just behind Will’s ear.

“Perfect.”

“Glove as well. If you like. Nitrile.”

Hannibal pauses, he'd prefer it to be just his fingers, but there's a certain logic, even with a basin and taps in the stall space. He considers for a moment or two until Will nudges against him, just a little,

“I'd rather not. Alright?”

Will turns his head so Hannibal can reach his mouth as they kiss, a little sloppy, a little wet, and as Hannibal slowly works one finger into him, Will shifts back to meet the push straight away. They both try not to groan. Will pants into Hannibal's mouth when he adds a second finger, and is making a tiny high keening sound by the time he adds a third. With a twist to Hannibal's fingers, just grazing the sweetest spot, he manages a gasp,

“Now. Fuck. Really. Now.”

Although they don't usually use condoms it's quick work and they both stutter when Hannibal slowly aligns himself, breathes in Will’s ear, hot and damp and then breaches Will’s rim, and then without pausing, muscles his way in. Will clenches down almost straight off. Hannibal holds still and asks urgently,

“Did I hurt you?”

Hannibal waits, holds him close, as Will swallows a few times,

“No. I'm good. Just well used. Give me a little more.”

Slowly Hannibal pulls out and then pushes back in, with a maddeningly slow grind,

He smiles when Will whines at him,

“More than that.”

He does it again, meeting Will’s harder push back and then they're away. And only conscious of each other, the hard thrust, the slap of skin, the wet noises, the low moan that Hannibal makes into Will’s neck, the thready gasps Will can't help. When Hannibal holds him tight round the waist with one arm and works his cock with the other hand Will knows it's going to all be over very soon. For him at least. He leans hard against the wall, pushes his back into a tighter arch, he sounds wrecked when he just about manages,

“I'm going to come. Soon. Really soon.”

Hannibal works even harder and Will makes the kind of little desperate noises that push Hannibal over the edge.

“Fuck. Hannibal. Fuck!! Really! Oh my god. Fuck!”

He clenches down hard as he comes, and it’s that of course that pushes Hannibal right to the brink,

“God Will. My love.”

He pushes in a few more times, as far as he can, Will gasping now because he's just a little too sensitive. And Hannibal swears agains, and comes.

For a while they both lean against the wall. Hannibal with one arm still round Will's waist. The other hand covering one of Will's. Slowly Will leans further forward until his head is resting against his forearm.

They both breathe. Let their heart rates slow. And then slowly, slowly, slowly, pull apart. Neither of them say much as they become more aware of the bathroom beyond their stall. There are clearly other people using it. Slowly they smile at each other. Then more widely, until they are both grinning huge and inappropriate smiles given the circumstances.

The two condoms are disposed of in the waiting bin. They both try not to laugh. When they've both washed up Hannibal pulls Will into a loose embrace, and they lean into each other. They hear the outer door of the rest room pulled open and then bang shut and they both listen. It seems they are alone. Cautiously Will unlocks and opens the door and they head across the washroom and then out into the atrium. There are still plenty of people around. Will smiles,

"Did the interval bell go?"

Hannibal makes a non commital shrug,

"I'm not sure. What's the time?"

Will checks his watch,

"Damn. We were only in there for eight minutes. Oh my actual god, eight minutes! I thought it was much longer."

He glances at Hannibal who looks beyond smug,

"Did you now?"

"Oh shut up. I should have kept my big mouth shut."

As he walks ahead, he turns round and winks,

"Maybe next time, eh?"

Hannibal can only follow him and smile in reply.

…….

Back in the auditorium Hannibal holds Will's hand again, and then all the way through the final act. When the lights go down they lean into each other a little. Enjoy the music. Enjoy each other. The Opera ends with colour and a flourish and they both applaud.

"Hotel? Or would you like a drink?"

"A drink at the hotel I think? Would that be alright? Or would you like some more bright lights and frivolity?"

Hannibal snorts at this,

"I think we've proved ourselves utterly capable of supplying our own frivolity. I appreciate we're both probably a little tired, but, any requests?"

Will puts his arm through Hannibal's.

“Really? You're insatiable! God. I might not be able to move if we try again?”

“And if I'm willing to do the heavy lifting? I've been thinking about what you said, I think when we were at your father’s”

Will frowns, honestly? For all that that was only two weeks ago? All that he can really recall is the hot moment of embarrassment and then a kind of retrospective glee about being caught having sex like the horny kid he never really was as a teenager. Or even as an adult.

“Ok. I'll ‘fess up. Which conversation? Oh wait! Not the one where I said I wanted you to fuck me into the mattress but gently?”

Hannibal presses against his arm, laughs a little,

“Yes that one. I think you might have been worried about the structural integrity of the trailer.”

“I think I'm worried about the structural integrity of my arse!”

He says it a little loudly and is slightly mortified when the couple walking towards them both turn and give them something of a look, Will widens his eyes and looks at Hannibal,

“I'm going to remember so much about this weekend!”

“Properly ours?”

They stop in the middle of the street and look at one another, then move to the side, trying to be considerate to the people making their way home after a Saturday night of entertainment, crowding the sidewalk as they spill out from bars and hotels, clubs and restaurants. Sodium lights glittering off the puddles and drips from rain that must have fallen when they were inside.

Will puts a lazy arm round Hannibal's neck and presses against him,

“Yeah. Properly ours. I know it's only a few days to go. But these two months? Even with the weird stalker, oh and Cassie’s brother punching me, and the fucking East Coast Killer or I-70 killer or the hugely inappropriate Moth-Man, whatever, even without all that, oh and my headaches and the sodding PTSD, and, well I'm sure I’ve forgotten something, but it's been beyond good. I know the next six months will be tough. I know that. But this has set us up incredibly well. Thank you. We both do. Hannibal. Really.”

Hannibal strokes his face, doesn't say anything for a moment, just looks his fill,

“My darling Will. It is I who should thank you. You're always so generous. With yourself. Everything. And yes. The next six months, terrible. But this is a good springboard. The best.”

He looks down,

“It will go both quickly and far too slowly. As these things do. And when I come back?”

Will nods.

“Yeah. When you do.”

Chapter End Notes

So many typos! Which I've gone back and fixed. Sorry.

Adopt a Soldier AU - Part 78

Brian looks down at the thing in Abigail's hands,

"Sweetheart? What is that? Did Jimmy buy something terrible? And Abs, honey, it's not really your fault ok, but why didn't you stop him?"

She smiles,

"He said you'd really like it. You do, don't you?"

Brian looks up above and over her head to Jimmy who is leaning on a convenient fire hydrant outside what could generously be called a 'shabby chic' shop, or more accurately a 'junk shop', if you were feeling less kind.

"I'm sure I'd love it if I had any clue what it is. Jims? Help me out here?"

His fiancé, and boy does that make him smile, laughs,

"Do you know? I'm not really sure myself. Definitely a wet specimen though. Or it was. Once. I think it might have dried out. The case is cracked."

Brian would be forgiven if what he mutters next is anything to go by,

"That's not the only thing round here that's cracked."

Abigail smiles some more,

"My Grannymaw and grandparispop have lots of things like this at home. She sent me photographs. She wanted to know if we wanted anything. I'm not sure really. I think Hannibal would like the stuffed fox but daddy made a funny noise when I suggested it."

"But a stuffed fox sounds great! Don't you think Bri?"

Abigail looks between them,

"I think it really does. And I could add some wings and then it would be a dragon fox. Which Aunty Murasaki says is definitely a thing."

She leans towards Jimmy with a smile,

"Aunty Murasaki sends me Godzilla stickers and post cards. She says she's not a big fan of Hello Kitty but she likes Mothra very much. I like her. She says Uncle Robertus and her are going to come and visit soon. Probably when Hannibal is away, so we don't have too much time to miss him. Thats a good idea. Don't you think? I want them to stay with us but daddy thinks the dogs might be too much for them. What do you think?"

Jimmy and Brian exchange looks,

"Sweetie, I think Winston would be fine, but I'm honestly not sure about Buster."

She looks a little doubtful, but then her face clears.

“That’s probably true. Maybe they should stay in Hannibal’s house in Baltimore then. I’ll ask daddy. Can we get ice cream now?”
Brian smiles at her and crouches down beside her on the sidewalk and takes the glass jar from her and carefully adds it to the already bulging shopping bag he’s carrying.

“Did Jimmy say there would be ice-cream? Isn’t it a bit cold for desserts?”

She shakes her head very sincerely,

“Jimmy said you’d say that. He said I just needed to be a bit determined. If that’s what i wanted. I really do. Really. Peanut butter and jelly ice cream.”

She pauses,

“Please.”

Brian looks at Jimmy, clearly trying not to laugh.

“You're leading her into terrible habits! Can I just say that when Abigail is a teenager and has clearly got everyone wrapped round her little finger that I will refrain from saying I told you so Jimmy Price.”

Jimmy grins,

“Yeah. I know. You love it really.”

Brian rolls his eyes. Sadly this is true.

.....

Will looks down at his cell phone and leans over and gently prods Hannibal,

“Are you awake? Hannibal? Do you want some tea or coffee? Or even lunch? Hannibal?”

Hannibal makes a noise somewhere between ‘it’s too early’ and ‘only if it’s intravenous’. Will smiles and slides out from between the bed clothes. He stretches. Ooooh, that aches. So does that. And yup. So does that. In a good way. Oh. Maybe that twinge is a bit much. He tries rolling his shoulders. And then looks back at the picture on his cell; Brian and Abigail holding some terrible thing in a glass specimen jar, though it looks like all the fluid has drained out. Weird. Still, she looks happy and the little note at the end is sufficiently ambiguous as to make him wonder about what news he’s missed from Bev.

He checks back in his text messages but there’s nothing. Hannibal mumbles something so Will reaches down a hand and holds his ankle through the comforter and he grumbles some more. Will thumbs his way through a text to Bev who pings him back almost immediately demanding what he knows and from whom.

He slips into the main room of the small suite and calls her.

A few minutes later Hannibal can hear laughing and talking in the next room. Alright, at least it’s only a one way conversation, so, probably Will on his cell phone. He squints at the bedside clock,

good god, how on earth did it get to past 13:30? That's a lie-in of quite epic proportions for him. He does some of the same stretching as Will, unwittingly imitating the shoulder roll and feeling of a twinge in unexpected places.

Standing up is something he approaches somewhat tentatively. It is just possible that the two glasses of brandy he drank last night might have been two too many. But they had arrived back at the hotel both of them in giddy high spirits and alcohol and then a very lengthy languorous fuck through the mattress had seemed like and was an excellent idea. Now though? His head regrets him not having been quite together enough to drink the glass of water Will had actually got out of bed to bring him.
He suspects that Will drank his own large glass of water if his cheerful tone is anything to go by. Why is Will such a lark? But then he also seems to be an owl. An owl and a lark? When he was a child his father had once described a friend of theirs who was rather like this as an 'annoying'. Hannibal had wondered for ages what kind of bird this was and had even spent some time looking up different bird species in some guide books. But Will isn't annoying. If anything Will is.. well, to Hannibal's mind he is perfect and the two months of close co-habiting hasn't diminished this regard in any fashion.

And he has only four more days until he leaves. He sighs. Better to get up then and make the most of this last 24 hours in New York. Perhaps a walk, the Green Line could be good, if it's not raining. Or even a boat trip. He hasn't done the circle round Manhattan island since he was small. Maybe that.

.....

Beverly reluctantly flashes her badge at the guy at the desk. Really? On a Sunday? Just, great. Still, the guy had been quite calm when he'd called. She follows the reception guard's directions to the visitor lounge on the first floor. She's not entirely sure she's ever been in here before, though as it turns out she sort of recognises the guy waiting there.

"Dr Tier? Hello? Err. I'm not a 100% sure what's going on? You've got coffee?"

He looks at her a little miserably,

"I wasn't sure you'd remember me from last year."

"Sure. The kid's programme. I remember. You're Eldon's post-doc aren't you? Is this about the moths?"

Randall shrugs a little,

"I'm sorry, I'm not really sure. It's a bit complicated. Could we go somewhere, a bit more, or a bit less..?"

He trails off and she takes pity on him,

" A bit more comfortable and abit less like an interrogation room?"

Randall nods again,

"Sure" she says "Come on. We'll get coffee too. You might not need it but I definitely do. And not to be rude, but this couldn't wait until Monday?"

She sees the look on his face and sighs,

“It’s ok. I can see. It couldn’t wait until Monday. How long you been worried about whatever it is?”

He makes a non-committal noise and she sort of pats him on the arm in an effort to put him at ease. She’s not entirely sure she’s succeeded as he makes a small sad noise.

In the cafeteria there are quite a number of people spread around, there’s always a few techs keeping an eye on tests and experiments, a few agents trying to keep on top of paper-work and briefings, a few auxiliary staff doing the things they do essential to keeping a large organisation working day to day. They get some coffee and she debates the virtue of a muffin. She resists. Just.

“Ok Dr Tier, tell me what you got...”

.....

Jack sighs. He and Bella are actually sitting down for a meal when Bev calls. Bella doesn’t say anything just smiles a small tight smile when he raises his eyebrows, rolls his eyes and then listens closely. He asks a few questions and Bella watches him go from frowning, to consternation, back to frowning and then maybe a touch of bewilderment before going back to a deep frown. He’s getting a permanent mark between his brow she notices. Etched into his skin. A reminder of all the stress he and his colleagues are under.

When he ends the call he looks at her and makes a kind of despairing shrug,

“This stalker? This fucking stalker. Unbelievable. Ok. So. Will’s entomology friend Eldon? Yeah? You met him at the potluck?”

Bella nods, sure, the fun bug guy. She remembers.

“Ok. So he has an intern post-doctoral student guy. Nice. Studious. Quiet. He’s been in to see Bev, yeah right, on a Sunday, she loved that, anyway, their department ran a student thing last year. Seniors, High School, that kind of thing. Fierce competition to get in and so on, two weeks. Got put up in an ok hotel. Good for the resume. They spent a few days with us, coincided with one of the open days. Got it?”

She nods again,

“Sure. Some kids, some bugs, some trips out. Right?”

Jack shrugs,

“Exactly so. Anyway. Randall, that’s the intern, didn’t know anything about our stalker. Why would he? But Eldon mentioned it. They talk about the I-70 case. The moths? Anyway they talk. And the thing about the guy getting in touch, and about the moths, and about the stalker? So, Randall remembers one of the kids being really into the whole bug thing. He means, really into it. And he just wondered if maybe the kid came from where the stalker stuff came from, you know, trying too hard to be noticed. And Bev checked. And it doesn’t, there doesn’t seem to be a connection, though we have to chase the photos down of the kids on the programme, just to completely discount him. But, and here’s the kicker, but the email from the person who contacted Freddie Lounds came from a desk-top in the library of the small town where this kid lives.”

Bella looks at him in surprise,

“But surely if he’s just a kid in school, he must be too young to be the killer? Mustn’t he?”

Jack frowns at her some more, and then slowly he says,

“Yeah. He must be, mustn’t he? But maybe someone else in his life? An older sibling? A relative? Even a family friend? Someone who knows about the moths.”

“Someone who knows about the moths.” She echoes back to him.

She frowns then, looks down at her meal, slowly congealing on the plate, she’s more or less totally lost her appetite anyway, though she should make the effort if only to try and help Jack have one less thing to worry about. She looks back up at him.

“Though it does still leave the question of who the stalker is. If it isn’t this kid. You’re not thinking this intern though are you? The post-doc? Wouldn’t be the first time someone tried to insert themselves into a case would it? Isn’t it a classic tell?”

He nods, yes it is, a classic tell. But often for the killer and not just an obsessed bystander. Maybe Dr Tier could stand a little extra scrutiny?

.....

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 79

Chapter Notes

> Art by the wonderful @le-wendigogo, my upload skills aren't quite up to scratch, so lets just imagine nor are Will's!!

Will stretches out in bed. He knows, he surely knows, that as per usual he will have to get up in a few minutes and be the responsible adult. Hannibal must be coaxed from bed and sent on his way to work, Abigail must be loved to breakfast and school and he must get up and go into the lab to get caught up on, well, every damn thing. At least he can look forwards to teasing Bev.

Hannibal mumbles against him and reaches for Will under the covers. Will allows himself the brief luxury of being groped and fondled and then kisses Hannibal lightly just as the alarm on Hannibal's cell goes off.

"Dear god in heaven why did I set it to 'the Entrance of the Queen of Sheba'?"

He fumbles desperately for the phone to switch off Handel's glorious piece of baroque pomp. He had explained about different kinds of music to Abigail and she had asked if it was really 'baroque and roll' as her grandpere liked the American kind. Hannibal had been both amused and enchanted. And isn't that Abigail all over? He smiles to himself, he is in so much trouble here. He tries to pull Will back to him but he dances out of the way and laughs over his shoulder as he goes to the ensuite.

"If you give me five minutes I'll bring you coffee."

"I'm not sure I have time for it in bed."

"I set your alarm back ten minutes so you would have time. You're welcome."

Will ducks at the poorly aimed pillow that Hannibal throws after him and laughs cheerfully again.

Hannibal closes his eyes and lets himself starfish over the whole of the mattress. Even a large bed is a luxury to be savoured. His camp cot back at base is comfortable enough but its dimensions aren't what could be called generous.

Dressed and composed Will brings him a cup of coffee a few minutes later.

"I love you. You've got three minutes. You want me to remind you?"

Hannibal shakes his head and smiles,

"It may be time I re-learnt how to be an autonomous agent of my own destiny."

Will grins,

“Ahh, Colonel Lecter in actually getting up when the alarm goes off shock? Good luck.”

.....

Abigail yawns all the way to school, and Will worries slightly that Miss Bloom will be cross about her clearly having stayed up on a school night.

The evening before had been a lot of fun, the return from New York accompanied by Mischa coming to dinner. Will thinks Hannibal might have told her about the aborted elopement as she smiles at Will so fondly throughout the evening. And Abigail had been giddy from excitement all evening and well beyond her usual bedtime. Partly the residue of a wonderful weekend even though Mischa reported she’d been a little quiet when she was introduced to Bedelia and had whispered a question about whether she was an actual fairy princess. But also partly the excitement of having the four of them together in their own home, albeit a rented one.

None of them had even mentioned the fact that there was only three days to go. It would come soon enough without taking the time away from enjoying the moment right in front of them! And Will hadn’t the heart to refuse Abigail’s please to stay up just a little more when he too is quietly, perhaps a little desperately, counting the hours.

Abigail may just have to yawn her way through the whole day. And Mischa and Bedelia and Mason are coming for dinner tonight, fuck and Miriam and Tobias. And Frankie? Maybe Frankie too. Shit, Will thinks, he’ll have to shop, they definitely haven’t got enough food in for, he counts, nine of them.

.....

General Davies leans back in his chair and swivels a little, He’s always liked this chair and the fact that twice someone has tried to pinch it and he’s had it back within the hour. He smiles to himself, on a whim his wife had got some fake dog tags made with his name and number on so he could attach them to it. He’d pondered this a little, not exactly respectful, but had then decided that he could do with being seen as having something of a lighter side.

He leans forwards when there is a knock on his door and his own Sargeant pushes it open,

“Colonel Lecter for you Sir.”

The General nods and stands to greet Hannibal, first with a salute, then a handshake and then a casual wave directing Hannibal into the chair opposite his across the desk.

“Well, Hannibal, I’ve read the final report. The VP is pleased. I’m pleased. You?”

“Overall? Yes. I’m also pleased with how it’s all worked out. Of course there are some issues that have emerged that will need to be pursued and we might need to think a little strategically about some of the dynamics that were observed.”

The General nods agreement. He likes that Hannibal and he basically speak the same tactical language and see some of the same things.
“How about your staff?”

“Exemplary. They both exceeded my expectations and achieved their role and professional development objectives. I’m very pleased. And you know my Sargeant got engaged?”

The General nods, his wife keeps talking about it, she's angling to be some kind of matron of honour he thinks. Just for a moment he wonders if he ought to drop a hint. Maybe something, she has been very on board with this recent angle he's working.

"She's very fond of his fiancée, Frankie? She's a sweet girl." He frowns. "Can't dance worth a damn though."

Hannibal smiles,

"Will says she practised with a mop and broom following videos on You Tube."

The General is startled into a laugh,

"Well good for her. That shows initiative." He pauses, "I expect you're hoping to bring him back with you?"

Hannibal smiles again, he hadn't wanted to raise this too early in the negotiations, but it would be perfect, for multiple reasons.

"It would be good all round. And Frankie would be very grateful."

A small unspoken look of understanding and acknowledgement of some bargain made passes between them.

"All right then. You can tell him. Six months. Buddish says for sure now. And you're still sure about not taking Matthew Brown's job?"

Hannibal nods,

"I can see the appeal, but, overall, Will and I have agreed that the six months will probably go very quickly, there will be a lot to do."

The General looks at him appraisingly,

"Very quickly, and impossibly slowly?"

Hannibal nods, just a little sadly, and the General gives him a sympathetic look. Even he can see the appeal of the Grahams.

.....

In the lab the team spend a lot of the morning and afternoon oscillating between high humour and entertainment and some grinding miserable moments when they re-consider the I-70 case and the possible intersections with their own stalker.

In a fit of over-exuberance Will invites the three of them to supper as well, and then remembers to add in Molly. Dammit. Twelve, nope, thirteen. But if he is to have tomorrow evening with just Hannibal and Abigail then tonight can at least be a send off for everyone. And haven't they all been part of what's made the last two months so memorable?

The impromptu invitation goes a long way to cheering things up, and when Jack comes in for the next round of debate about Randall Tier Will invites him and Bella too, and then in a fit of

something he recognises as him stretching himself a little thin but unable to hold back he calls Frederick and asks him as well. (Sixteen? Well. Why not?)

When they break for an afternoon cup of coffee and tea he texts Hannibal

>I might have accidentally invited everyone for supper tonight! We'll have sixteen. Sorry.<

A text comes back only a few moments later.

>Eighteen. I invited the general and his wife as well.<

Will laughs and then has to explain to the rest of the team. Bev smirks,

"You're like one of those couples that people that aspire to be. An actual poster couple for good relationships."

Will grins,

"You have no idea! Here.. have a look at the mock up the Army is thinking of using.."

He thumbs his phone round and shows them a picture of him and Hannibal, Abigail, wearing her fox onesie reaching towards Hannibal. It is impossibly cute and loving and perfect.

Bev looks at him, just a little emotion shining in her eyes.

“Really and truly. An actual poster family. Oh Will.”

“Yeah.” He smiles. “Damn straight.”

.....

In one of the many canteens in the Pentagon building Hannibal carries a tray over to Miriam and Tobias where they are saving a small table for the three of them. It’s one of the things that Miriam likes about the Colonel, he will just muck in if the occasion calls for it.

“Coffee with a splash of milk. Some obnoxious thing with soy. And a muffin each. Which cost an arm and two legs so I hope they’re half way decent. The guy behind the counter said they were ‘gourmet’. I’m not entirely sure he knows the meaning of the word.”

The three of them sit and sip at their expensive drinks in crinkled cardboard cups. Hannibal laments the loss of proper china, he can’t remember when they switched out. Probably some time saving, or labour saving, or cost cutting exercise. A shame. Proper coffee in proper cups is good for morale.

“I wanted to say thank you. You’ve both done better than I could have hoped and it’s been noted in your files. I know we’ll get a chance to do the informal thing this evening, Tobias, you’re bringing Frankie? Yes? Good. I want to ask you something about her later, if you’ll remind me please? And I should warn you that the whole evening has got somewhat out of hand and there will be eighteen in attendance. I say that now, but there’s a good chance that by the end of the afternoon Will might also have invited the postal guy at Quantico and anyone he meets in the market that he thinks is interesting.” He pauses, “Anyway. Thank you both. Tobias, General Davies is planning on recommending you transfer back with me if you want to. Miriam, there’s some talk of promotion, getting your first stripes.”

The two soldiers look at him, seriously Miriam thinks, what she wouldn’t do for her Colonel or the Sargeant. As she looks at them both she knows it’s mutual. They make a damn good team. And even if she doesn’t come back as part of the Colonel’s staff he won’t forget her. He is a man of his word.

She holds up her cup,

“Sir. Thank you Sir. A toast. To good work done together.”

The two men raise their paper cups.

“Together.” They say, as one.

.....

“Fuck. I completely forgot that Buster would go demented. Fred, how is it always you. I am so sorry.”

Frederick Chilton laughs. Will is right, Buster is a terror and has not only picked up on the general air of excitement from the whole group but almost certainly knows that his Alpha, Will, is running on nervous energy right now. Fred doesn’t touch his arm but he manages to slow Will down with a look,

“Come and see me next week Will. I think we should go fishing. You can try and get me to learn that cast technique again.”

Will laughs,

“Frederick. You’re fine at it. Oh.”

He smiles and slows,

“Oh. Ok. Yeah. Ok. I get it. Sure. Actually that’s a good idea. Jack told me to take Wednesday next week. We could make a three quarter day of it?”

Frederick nods at him,

“Good, it’ll give me a chance to patch my waders over the weekend. And dig out something warm enough. Thanks Will.”

Will smiles back at him,

“I see what you’re doing Fred. Thanks. I appreciate it. Even better if we catch something. Right?”

“Right.”

...

“So, Judge D, Miriam, yeah? Miriam and my sister are being bridesmaids, but you know, I wondered, if maybe, I mean, would you? If it’s not too big a thing? I don’t mean to overstep or anything?”

“Oh Frankie! Thank you so much! I’d love to.”

...

“So, if you’re Hannibal’s sister and I’m Will’s late wife’s brother, what does that make us?”

“Family?”

...

“Are you Abigail’s teacher?”

“I am, I’m Miss Bloom, well, Alana, here, you’re one of the Colonel’s staff aren’t you, you came to the school?”

“I did, I’m Miriam Lass. Private first class ma’am.”

“I think you should just call me Alana.”

“Ma’am.”

...

“Aunty Bedelia, are you really a princess or was Aunty Mischa joking?”

“.....”

“You can hold Tentacles if you like.”

...

“Have you even begun packing?”

“Surprisingly yes. I’ve packed two boxes of things I won’t take back to base and my kit bag is ready.”

Bev looks around the house,

“Err, Hannibal, I more meant this house? Isn’t Will moving everything back this weekend?”

“Damn.”

....

“Even if we don’t get to do many more of these Jack, this is the best thing, you, me, and some laughing people.”

Jack can only nod.

...

In the kitchen Hannibal leans into Will.

“Everything I want and hope for is right here Will. Everything.”

“You’ll be back soon.”

“Not soon enough.”

“Not soon enough. But I’m hanging on.”

“We both are.”

.....

A hundred miles away or more someone makes a delivery to a UPS office addressed to Will at the lab in Quantico. And Freddie Lounds gets an email that makes even her blanche.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 80

Jack looks at his team. The tension in the lab is palpable.

“The email came from the same general area but not the same terminal. Best the tech guys can say is a fifty mile radius. And not from a private address, and not from a registered business address either.”

“Have they found the body yet?”

“They’re out now. Apparently the woodland in the background is distinctive and the local sheriff has got a search team out already. The coroner is on standby. I’m waiting on bug extraction. Dr Stammetts is waiting in Washington for the courier, if there’s need. Will? Anything?”

Will looks again at the picture in the email attachment that Freddie has forwarded to them.

“Juat from the condition of the body and the time frame, I’d say he’s escalating. Frederick?”

Frederick nods,

“I thinks this means that the other email wasn’t from the same person. They may be connected, but this guy? This guy isn’t having any of it. If he sees the emailer as competition I am sorry to say but I think he’s just upped the ante.”

Jack nods but it’s Jimmy who asks,

“Connected or not to our stalker?”

He dips his head towards the box that UPS delivered in the morning and which has now been subjected to a battery of tests. Inside there had been a small branch of what they now know is mulberry as well as two preserved dry specimens and several pupa and chrysalis.

Will shrugs,

“Maybe an indirect one. Hard to say for sure.”

“Why moths?” says Brian, “I mean, do they have any special significance? Do they mean something? I get the whole metamorphosis transformation thing. Anything else? Some obscure symbolism?”

“The hawk moth family are known as honey stealers.”

Jimmy snorts, he loves him some bees. Will smiles at him a little,

“People are more often frightened of moths than butterflies, they’re nocturnal rather than diurnal. Is that the kind of thing you mean? Because we could be looking at someone who sees their transformation as happening in dark places, or that of their victims. The symbolic burials could parallel the time in the chrysalis? Something about being driven by the moon, after all, this is the first time the guy has broken cycle? Moths are also exceptionally well camouflaged, and, well, they’re absolutely knock out when it comes to attracting a mate.”

The whole team is quiet then, Jack sighs,

“Is that what this is about? Our squirrel of a guy can’t get it up so he’s storing these girls waiting for them to change?”

Will looks at the picture again, thinks of the other bodies, the pupa in the throats. The many layers between them and the answer, between them and the perpetrator. He lets everything slide away from him. This isn’t something he often does as it often leaves him shaken and disoriented, but just sometimes, when things are desperate he hauls on his own nerves and lets the victim’s last breaths leak into him. Lets the killer’s.

The others go quiet

He breathes slower and steadier and if they wonder what is happening behind his closed eyes none of them ask. It’s taxing enough on him as it is. Even Bev has only seen him do this once before. He takes a huge gulping breath and opens his eyes, the forest and the woods and the dismal graves shine there.

“It’s a punishment. Somehow they had the opportunity to seek something better and they failed in some way. They had the chance to change or make a difference, and they didn’t. The perp sees it as a choice, and he’s chastising them. They had all the right constituent parts and like a caterpillar he hopes that as they dissolve they’ll become something more, something better. Something that will seek the light. Someone who will become.”

He pauses,

“It will be someone lots of people talk to, just as part of their routine, no one will stand out. They will have seen or heard each victim at some point and each victim will have told them about some choice they made of which the perp disapproved. If we look back in the history of each victim we’ll probably encounter some major fork in the road in their lives where they went one way rather than the other; a job change, a divorce or separation, loss of custody, a move. The guy is sedentary, in a role where people trust him but not one that stands out, not a therapist or counsellor, not a doctor, maybe in a service role, but not menial, not a waitress or server. And he’s got some other selection criteria at play. These were all comfortable financially, so he doesn’t punish a mistake based on financial deprivation. It is almost someone regarded as stable, financially solid and dependable, they might be married or in a long term relationship. They have property.”

He stops and wipes his hands over his face, pushing up his glasses onto his forehead. he re-settles them over his nose.

“Fits for Margot doesn’t it?”

Jack nods, he doesn’t lay a hand on Will’s arm, that probably wouldn’t go so well right now, but his tone is soothing,

“You’re right. It does. I’m sorry Will. I wouldn’t have asked you to do it. And I still don’t expect you to go out there. But that’s all good. And combined with the 50 mile radius? We’re narrowing it down. Is it worth you talking to Dr Stammetts about it?”

“Sure. I’ll give him a call. See if we can narrow down any more stuff on the moths themselves. You cleared his post-doc?”

“Tier? Well, we know he’s in Washington, and has been for the whole weekend. He didn’t send the email.”

Will nods,

“Ok. Hannibal flies early evening tomorrow, I’ll see Eldon in the morning if he’s free.”

“If they find the body he might even have got the new bug by then.”

Will rolls his eyes,

“Not a bug. But I take your point.”

.....

Abigail sits at her desk and looks down at the drawing she is doing. It’s just possible she might have had a few snivels throughout the afternoon and Miss Bloom is keeping an eye on her, just to be sure. Colonel Lecter is due to collect her at the end of the school day and Alana has intentionally planned forty minutes of drawing and then some nice bright stories about optimism and hope and faithful friends for the very end of the afternoon.

Abigail carefully puts aside whatever it is she has been drawing and starts again, or maybe starts something new. Casually Alana makes a circuit of the class, commenting here or there, encouraging, asking careful questions.

Abigail’s first drawing is of her and her father and someone who is clearly Hannibal Lecter. Her second drawing is of a woman and someone smaller who is probably Abigail. The woman has angel’s wings, or what Alana supposes are angel wings. Maybe her mother then. The wings are sort of wrapped around Abigail in as much as a seven year old can manage something as complex as this.

As she draws she seems more confident and she pulls her original picture back towards her and then draws the woman standing behind the family with the wings coming round to circle all of them. She bends over the picture and works hard on it for the nest twenty minutes. Alana watches only for the first few and then slides away.

.....

“Eldon? Will Graham here. Yeah, thanks. I’m all right. Bit anxious, but you know, nothing new there. Yeah. Tomorrow. I know. But it is what it is. Yeah? I know. Always. Jack says he called you? Oh they have. Fuck. I’ve been in the car. Ok. Damn. Tonight? Shit? Oh. Ok. I get it. Tomorrow? All right. In the morning? I can do that. Sure. Sure? That’s great. I’ll see you then. Thanks Eldon. Be careful right.”

Will ends he call on his cell and grabs his briefcase from the front seat. As he opens the driver’s side door and slides out he looks at the rental they’ve been in for the last seven weeks. It’s done ok, not quite right, but it’s helped them all see what would or wouldn’t work for them in the longer run. But he knows that really this is the last night it will actually seem like home.

.....

Bedelia hitches herself off the stool next to the long mahogany bar and greets Mischa with a brief kiss,

“Good day? Or merely passable?”

“Not too bad thank you. Are we eating here or just a drink?”

“Not to Hannibal and Will’s then?”

“I’m collecting Abigail from school tomorrow afternoon and then meeting Hannibal and Will at the airport. I didn’t want to cramp their style tonight.”

She wiggles her eyebrows and Bedelia smiles.

“I’d ask if you were sure but I’m not so generous. Perhaps a drink here and then dinner somewhere really nice. After all your brother is going tomorrow.”

“And we’re toasting him in his absence?”

“Yes. Something like that I think.”

.....

“Hannibal, just explain why we’re actually packing boxes on your last night here?”

Hannibal sighs as he tapes and labels yet another box of books. How on earth did they manage to bring so many with them? Surely he can’t have bought this many in just two months? Can he? Has Will? Are they both book hoarders? He’d use his tablet but there is nothing as comforting to his mind as the turn of a page and the smell of old books and leather bindings.

“Beverly reminded me that I am not a guest here and that if I didn’t ‘pitch in’ now you’d be left to do this all alone.”

Will grins at him,

“Except she and Molly and Preller and Mason and Dragon are all coming to help. I think she was pulling a fast one. What we do now she won’t have to.”

Hannibal frowns, and then shakes his head,

“Even if that is so, I should prefer to do at least some of it.”

Will smiles,

“Ok then, how about another five boxes and then we stop? Abs?" He raises his voice a little, "How’s homework doing? Ten minutes then hot chocolate and a bath and a proper Hannibal story and then bed?”

He can hear a small voice of agreement from the living room, he smiles at Hannibal again,

“She’s got some things for you to take back, she’s going to give it to you at the airport, make sure you’ve room in your hand luggage, ok?”

“Things I can take safely on board?”

Will nods.

“Should be fine. And I explained why she couldn’t bring the dogs to see you off, you have to kiss them in the morning.”

“As long as I can kiss you later?”

“Smooth, Colonel Lecter. Very smooth.”

They both laugh and get back to more boxes. Hannibal marvels yet again when he finds even more books in a carrier bag behind the sofa. He did buy these. Probably.

.....

Sex that evening is quiet and slow, and has lost none of the intensity and passion of the first time on Hannibal’s brief first visit. How things have grown from there? Will and Preller have taken to calling that occasion Hannibal’s ’36 hour lay-over’, the humour of it somehow enhancing its significance rather than undermining it. And that they can both laugh about it is testament enough. The next six months may be hard but not impossible.

“Will Tobias and Miriam be on the same flight?”

“Miriam yes, Tobias no. He has an extra 24 hours to go with Judge Davies and Frankie to some wedding thing.”

Will laughs quietly,

“I like it! That’s some cunning manoeuvring right there. Fair enough. I've got to see Eldon in the morning. He’s flying up to the body tonight, they found it. I thought they would, and then he’s bringing back all the bug evidence tomorrow. I said I’d help. We’re going to thrash the moth stuff around some more.”

“Mischa is collecting Abigail?”

“Yup, that’s all under control. And we should have at least an hour maybe two at the airport. Are you going in tomorrow? Really, I’m sorry that I have to, but I think Jack has been beyond patient.”

“And we’d both just maunder around wouldn’t we. And you'd just worry about there being another murder which you might help to prevent?”

“Ahh. Yes. We would. And yes, I would. you're right. it would put a dampener on the day.”

Hannibal pauses, he’d wondered if he should ask about the thing that Will did in the lab today, but, although it may not be the most auspicious moment he considers it is better for things to be in the open between them.

“Bev texted me earlier. Would you like to tell me about what happened in the lab?”

Will buries his head under Hannibal’s shoulder and mutters something, then he takes a breath and puts his head back on the pillow and turns on his side tight in against Hannibal. Idly he strokes up

and along Hannibal's chest, not particularly purposeful, just a slow drag of his fingers through Hannibal's chest hair.

"All right. I thought she might say something. It can be, well, I can be a strung out after. It's just something I can do sometimes, sort of see beyond what's physically there."

He stops for a moment,

"That's not quite it. You know about the synaesthesia and the empathy thing. It's to do with that, it's as though I can suddenly understand everything the evidence means. It's always about the evidence but it's like being able to put it together in a different way. I don't do it often because it can be very hard to return to a sense of my own self afterwards. And just sometimes I look, but I can't really see anything. And sometimes it's too hard to look. there was a while, after Margot when I didn't dare. It would have been very easy to get lost in it. Sometimes though, it just unfolds, and I can see it all. Today was like that. I don't know if that's because of Margot or not. I can't tell. But I could really see his whole design."

"But the experience wasn't as difficult as it has been in the past?"

"Not as difficult, no. Not nearly. And if we had more time right now I'm sure you might have some theories about that."

"I was a surgeon Will not a psychiatrist."

"Yeah, all right. But you should hear Jimmy."

"And what does the good Dr Price say."

"He says it's always easier to come back to love."

.....

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 81

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Over breakfast Abigail is a little subdued, Hannibal has already left, gone, with his bags, for a short meeting with an army colleague arranged somewhat at the last minute but useful for future liaison, probably. He'd got up and dressed before she was even mostly awake. His departing kiss through her sleepy-ness hadn't quite woken her up enough to be clear on what was happening. Now she regrets not being that little bit more alert even though she knows she will see him later.

"You'd just have been sad Abs. We both would. Too like a last breakfast."

"It would be a last breakfast? Wouldn't it?"

"Only of this life."

They both eat their cereal and Will laments the fact that it sounds far too loud in the quiet of the house. Even Buster and Winston are quiet, Buster from having suffered the indignity of a big hug and scratch round the ears which he'd rolled over for, much to his doggy chagrin, and Winston because everyone else is sad. She had licked at Hannibal's face as he hugged her and he had been surprised to be moved by the friendly overture from his fellow bitch in the pack.

He knows this is how it will be, and though they must get through it, it doesn't mean at all that he has to like it. He'd had a bad five minutes in the shower earlier when he'd realised that the next six months would actually be the longest period they'd ever had apart since they first met. He'd managed to swallow it down, but it had been a close call. And he'd managed to laugh and send Hannibal off with a smile. And if there were a few tears once Hannibal's car had pulled out of the driveway? Well, there was no one there to call him on it. He'd sat on the porch and buried his face in Winston's scruff of fur round her neck and just tried to breathe.

"Right Abs. Five minutes. Teeth, bag, Hannibal's present, coat and everything in between. All right?"

Abigail eats a last mouth of cereal and nods. She slides out of her seat and takes her bowl and empty juice glass to the sink. She perches them beside Hannibal's mug and plate. And her bottom lip wobbles for a moment. She takes a deep breath, Hannibal had asked her to try and help her daddy through today just as Will would try and help her and she wants to hold up her end of the bargain.

"Come on then. Spectacles, glasses, brain and bag? How about you?"

She laughs. He says this all the time.

"Some of those."

.....

Tobias scratches his head. If he's honest he isn't entirely sure what he's looking at, or if it is different in any way from the six other dresses Frankie has tried on so far. At least the judge is

game and thank god she agreed to come out today, because otherwise? Otherwise he thinks he might have severely pissed off Frankie with his inability to tell the different between a flounce and a frill or sateen and satin. ‘Is there a difference?' He’d whispered to Judge Davies? She’d laughed and replied ‘about $100 a yard’. He’d tried not to gulp too much.

He thinks longingly of the plane he knows Miriam will be on this evening. And then berates himself for the thought. He has it easy he knows. Dress Uniform. Done.

Whereas Frankie? Frankie is doing the whole dress, head thing, train? What the hell is a train? Bouquet, hair, make-up, shoes, and has to match the flower girl aka Abigail and the Matron of Honour aka the Judge and her bitch of a sister as the bridesmaid along with Miriam who apparently has said she is willing to dress like a civilian for the duration. Brave woman he thinks.

Frankie comes out of the dressing room again and the Judge makes appreciative noises. He joins in. Really? He thinks Frankie would look good in a bin bag though he has the sense to realise this might not be such a smart thing to say.

.....

Will stretches his neck and tries to roll his shoulders a little. The traffic is terrible. He makes a mental note to watch for that later. Beside him in the passenger seat Bev decided to come so that she can try and keep Eldon and Will on track. All too easy for them to get excited over some small thing that is fascinating to everyone who hasn’t got some fuck off shit serial to catch, preferably this side of the summer when she faintly thinks she and Molly might get hitched. Though she thinks they should probably wait for when Hannibal is back. Yeah. That’s a thing.

“Will. When’s the Colonel coming home again.”

“Very end of September.”

“Got a fix on that yet?”

“Not yet. Why?”

“Thought Mol and I might get married sometime between Labour and Columbus Days. Or around then. Take a bit of holiday.”

Will nods, this makes sense and it’s sweet of Bev to think of waiting.

“Sure you don’t want to do it earlier?”

“Thought about it. But if Abs is going to be a flower girl then I know she’d like Hannibal to be there. Anyway wont it be a sequence? Tobias and Frankie? Jimmy and Brian? Me and Mol?”

She doesn’t say Will and Hannibal but Will is pretty sure she’s thinking it. He smiles.

“I’m trying to persuade Abigaill she can wear the same thing to all three.”

“I thought Frankie was getting her a dress?”

“Yeah. And?”

“You honestly think Jimmy won’t want to have a say in what she wears to their’s. Oh my god, he’s already looking at ties and vests and colour schemes. She’ll have to fit with all that. And if she’s gonna match with Lily she’ll have something new for ours too. Lily has views. So does her mom.”

Will sighs. He knows all about Bev’s sister,

“And she doesn’t think you’re stealing her thunder?”

Bev smirks,

“She does but I think Mom told her to shut up about it. They’re just glad I’m doing the deed.”

“I thought they liked Molly?”

“They love Molly. I think they like her better than me.”

“Yeah? But we all do Bev?”

She sticks her tongue out at him and laughs,

“Good job you’re driving Graham. There’ll be a reckoning later, don’t you worry about that.”

.....

Hannibal packs the last few items from his temporary desk into his briefcase. The car has been collected and his bags are waiting in his office. Miriam’s are there as well as they’ll travel together to the airport. He looks around, checks a few drawers, checks the filing cabinet for any stray bits of paper, so easy for things to slip beneath hanging files, but there’s nothing there.

He sighs. It’s very unlikely he’ll be allocated this office next time around. He shrugs his shoulders to himself. Really the office is the least of his concerns right now. It’s still on his mind whether he should suggest to Will that they buy somewhere before he comes back, somewhere they can settle into straight away. If he’d thought it through a little more maybe they could even have started looking before he went back. He shakes himself, this absolutely won’t do. The two months have been full enough as it is. How could they even have begun to find somewhere more permanent?

.....

Bev sits swinging her feet on the stool in the lab, as she’d suspected Will and Eldon are hammering away at some minute details about varying species and sub-species. She yawns or coughs loudly every now and again just to remind them that there are mere mortals nearby and frankly only someone really, really obsessive is going to go to these lengths. And yeah. Yeah. The guy probably really is this obsessive. Ugh she thinks. Moths? Yeuch. And now all three of the perps have fixated on them? For fuck’s sake.

She persuades them to break for lunch after they’ve been at it for two hours. And they talk all the way through as she sits and plays a game on her cell. They’re joined towards the end of the sandwich by Eldon’s intern. And if he looks a bit embarrassed Will is kind enough not to say he’s heard about the whole mini crush thing from Eldon or Bev or anyone else (i.e. everyone in the lab), if that’s what it was.

The specimen from the latest victim is waiting for them when they get back from lunch and a slightly disgruntled courier is placated somewhat when Bev takes him off for some food.

When she comes back there's no sign of anyone.

"Will? Dr Stammetts? Dr Tier? Will? What the fuck? Not funny guys."

She walks through the lab and into one of the store rooms. There she finds Dr Stammetts lying on the floor, kind of hunched up and holding his head.

She rushes to him and kneels down,

"Eldon? Fuck? What the hell happened? Are you ok? Oh my god?"

He groans and tries to sit up, and she gets an arm round him,

"Don't try to stand, I'll call the EMT, can you talk? What happened?"

She gets out her cell and dials 911, once she's connected she calls it in and then she carefully holds Eldon upright as he tries to get his bearings.

"I'm not sure. We were just talking. About the specimen. Nothing new really. We were going to have to wait for it to dry. Randall kept interrupting. About this kid on the programme last year? He said he told you?"

Bev nods,

"He did. But what happened next? Where's Will?"

"Will? Fucking hell! Will! I think, I think he took him. He hit me! God, he hit me, and he took Will!"

Bev almost screeches and Eldon winces, his head is tender and she can see a faint trickle of blood,

"Sorry. Fuck. He hit you and took Will? Was he armed?"

"I don't know. I'm sorry. He surprised me?"

Yeah she thinks, no shit.

"Where would he go? Do you know? Where would he take Will?"

Eldon blinks at her and she shivers as she thumbs in Jack's number,

"Jack? Jack, fuck, Tier took Will. We don't know where. We think he attacked Dr Stammetts and took Will. I don't know. I'm sorry. We don't know if he was armed. I don't think Will is."

.....

Hannibal and Miriam carry their bags down to a waiting taxi. Miriam still has just the kit bag and a work bag, Hannibal has managed to add a hold-all to his collection, in part though so he will have space in his hand luggage for whatever gift Abigail has for him at the airport.

The ride isn't especially long and they make desultory conversation on the way, perhaps both a little distracted by the conflicting emotions of leaving and thinking of what is left behind and thinking of the future and of what is to come.

.....

“Aunty Mischa!!”

Mischa lets herself be hugged enthusiastically and feels the simple pleasures of being adored by a small child. She kneels in front of her and strokes a hand down Abigail’s hair,

“My darling girl. Poppet, have you got everything? Bag? Coat? Your daddy said something about a present for Hannibal? Have you got that with you too?”

Abigail nods and holds up a cotton carrier bag evidently full of something wrapped within an inch of its life.

“Yes yes yes! And I made a special card today. Miss Bloom took a photograph of my best picture so I could pack it. I can get daddy to email it to you. It’s really good.”

Mischa hugs her again. This lovely child, so rewarding a friendship. And even though she knows it will be tricky she hopes she can at least help them get through the first few days of Hannibal’s absence before she must herself go back to Brussels.

.....

At the airport Hannibal helps Miriam unpack her single bag and then smiles ruefully as she ends up helping him with his. He stands guard whilst she goes to find a trolley.

“Here we are Sir. We can check all of this in. What time are the others arriving?”

Hannibal checks his watch,

“I expect Mischa and Abigail first. They’re coming straight from school. And Will is only coming from Washington. We should have at least 90 minutes before they call us through, maybe as much as two hours.”

He sounds hopeful and Miriam smiles at him, god this must be hard. Though he’s a stalwart as ever she thinks. Fuck. The cost of love is something else. But she laughs when she sees Abigail run half way across the departures hall and throw herself at Hannibal. Anyone would think, she considers, anyone would think he was her real daddy. She checks herself, fuck, of course he is her real daddy. She looks at love, and smiles.

.....

“Randall? I know you’re upset. I understand that. I’m so sorry. I think we can sort this out. Really. I do. No harm done.”

Randall doesn’t look at Will,

“Just keep driving.”

Fuck, thinks Will, he should be at the airport in half an hour, even if they’ve got some leeway. Fuck.

“Any place in particular?”

“Doesn’t matter. I just want..”

Will takes the next turning, at the very least he can drive in the right fucking direction,

“Tell me what you want Randall. I’m listening. I promise you.”

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Chapter End Notes

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next chapter posts tomorrow...

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 82

“Bev, calm down. I need you to talk me through this. What happened?”

Bev almost runs along the corridors of the Smithsonian heading for the car parks where she and Will left his car earlier. When she gets there she’s not surprised to find that it’s gone.

“Ok. Jack? You still there? Ok? Good. Thanks. I think they must have taken Will’s car, it’s not where we left it. Can we track his cell? Don’t we have the signature recorded somewhere? Or his car? Has he got a transponder fitted?”

She hears Jack shouting in the background, maybe to Brian to get one of the techs to come and help. She realises Jack is speaking to her again,

“Bev? Go back to Eldon, make sure he’s ok. See if he can lend you his car.”

Mentally she curses herself, she should have thought of this, stayed with him even if Eldon had urged her to check on the car. She turns around and runs back.

By the time she reaches the entomology lab the Emt has arrived and Eldon is being attended to. She asks about the car keys, and Eldon points to his jacket.

.....

At Quantico Jack gets one of the techs from a neighbouring lab to follow through Bev’s suggestions, Jack looms over the guy’s shoulder, and he nervously begins the process to set the system up to track Will’s cell. It takes a few minutes and with Jack’s frustration and both Jimmy and Brian hovering near by the tech has to work hard not to be distracted.

“Ok. Ok. I think we’ve got them. His cell is still turned on right? That’s good. Let’s hope it stays that way.”

“All right then. Where is he going?”

The tech brings up a larger map and they all lean in. The tech guy looks up over his shoulder at Jack,

“The airport? Could he be? Really?”

Jack looks at Jimmy and Brian,

“What time is Hannibal’s flight?”

.....

“I think vanilla please.”

Abigail looks hopeful, it’s just possible she might manage to wangle two milk shakes if she’s persuasive, one from Hannibal and maybe one from her daddy after Hannibal has gone.

She wrinkles her nose, that's not her favourite thought right now. Hannibal glances at Mischa and asks,

"Macchiato?"

She nods and Hannibal looks at Miriam who shakes her head. He walks to the counter and places the order for two coffees and a milkshake, the barista gives him a 10% discount that the chain offers to serving personnel, which he then promptly drops into the tip jar.

When the drinks arrive he brings them back to the table the other three have found and they crowd round.

Hannibal looks at his watch and then checks his cell and frowns slightly. Will has now run past the time he said he would be here, at the latest. He looks up at Mischa who makes a face at him so he writes a short text and sends it off.

He slips his cell back into his pocket and focuses his attention on Abigail.

.....

Will takes another turn off the road, effectively doubling back on himself.

"Randall? Would you like to talk? I can keep driving for now. But you know? Eventually we'll run out of gas. What do you want to say?"

Randall looks out of the side window of the car, watching the scenery, such as it is, go by. Will waits him out,

"Last summer?"

Will holds the steering wheel slightly tighter,

"Ok. Last summer? Go on?"

Randall doesn't say anything for a while,

"Last summer, with the kids programme? I kinda thought..."

Will risks a glance to the side to see that Randall is still looking out the window.

"Last summer Randall I was a mess. I was barely holding it together."

"But you were always so friendly. You were great with the kids. Eldon talked about your wife. So I kind of thought..."

Quietly Will asks,

"What did Eldon say about Margot."

"That he'd introduced you. But he kind of implied she wasn't around any more."

"That's true. She isn't."

“I couldn’t get it. You were just great. And Eldon said you had a daughter. A little kid. And I just thought..”

Will doesn’t say anything for a moment or two,

“You hardly met me.”

He can see out of the corner of his eye that Randall has hunched himself into his seat.

“Of course I was going to be nice Randall. Why wouldn’t I be? You’re my friend’s colleague. You worked really hard. You were great with the kids as well. And there is no reason for you to know this but the reason my wife isn’t around is because she was murdered.”

Randall looks at him then,

“Murdered?”

“It’s why Eldon has been brought in on the I-70 Killer, it’s just possible the same guy killed my wife and they can’t have the evidence just being looked over by someone so close to the case. Possibly.”

“But you...”

Will sighs and then signals to pull off the road on to the shoulder of the highway, once they’ve stopped he switches off the engine and then turns and faces Randall,

“It was almost three years ago back then. I’d been trying not to fall apart for months. I have a little girl. She was tiny when we lost Margot. She’s barely into school now. If I seemed to be keeping things together? Well that was partly because of the support of my friends.”

“And you’re doing better now?”

Will looks at him,

“I am. Randall. God. Listen, Abigail adopted a soldier through the pen-pal programme and it’s how Hannibal and I met.”

“This is the guy you’re with?”

“We’re getting married in the autumn Randall.”

Randall chews on a thumbnail,

“I’ve fucked this up entirely haven’t I?

Will takes a deep breath,

“Not yet.”

.....

Mischa frowns at Hannibal as he glances at his watch yet again, she smiles brightly at Abigail,

“Abs sweetie, don’t you need the loo or something? Maybe Miriam can take you?”

Private Lass smiles at Abigail,

“Actually I need to use the rest room. Will you come with me Abigail? Make some space for another shake?”

Abs slurps the last little bit of milk from her glass and agrees readily enough, Hannibal and Mischa watch as she holds Miriam’s hand and skips along beside her across the departures hall.

Mischa leans forwards across the table and clasps Hannibal’s hands,

“What can have happened? You’ve tried his cell haven’t you?”

Hannibal draws it out and shows her the severe absence of any message or voice mail or text from Will.

“I can’t imagine what could possibly be holding him up.”

Mischa watches her brother’s face,

“He hasn’t ducked out Hannibal. If that’s what you’re thinking. He wouldn’t do that, to you or Abigail.”

“Mischa? I don’t honestly know what to think. Why hasn’t he texted at least?”

“Try him again.”

.....

Deep in his pocket Will’s cell buzzes. And a few moments later it buzzes again. Randall looks at him.

“Will that be Beverly Katz?”

“Probably. Maybe my boss, she’ll have called him.”

“Agent Crawford?”

“Yeah. Jack. You’ve met him.”

Randall nods.

“Ok, so Jack. Maybe. Or maybe Hannibal.”

“In the middle of the afternoon?”

Will sighs,

“He’s leaving today.”

“What does that mean?”

“He’s on active duty. You know he’s a soldier? He goes back to his base out east today.”

“Now?”

Will looks at the old analogue clock on the dash of the car,

“He should go through security in about thirty five minutes.”

Randall looks at the clock and then back at Will,

“Give me your cell.”

Will hands it over,

“What’s the pass.”

“It’s Abigail’s birthday.”

Randall looks at him again,

“Start the car. I think we can still make it.”

Will doesn’t give him a chance to change his mind.

.....

Just as Abigail returns Hannibal’s cell buzzes, Mischa looks at him expectantly,

“Will has been caught in traffic. He’s still thirty minutes out, maybe forty.”

He looks up at Mischa,

“He’s cutting it very fine.”

“But he is coming.”

.....

In the lab SUV Jack has his line open to the tech back at Quantico,

“What do you mean they’ve stopped?”

There’s a silence on the other end of the line and the tech guy then says,

“They’ve started again. The car is moving. Or at least, the cell is.”

“And where are they going now?”

He tries for patience but Jack thinks he might be missing the right note, never the less the guy says,

“I think still the airport.”

Jack looks at Brian,

“You get that?”

Brian nods,

“I got it.”

.....

Bev clicks her cell onto speaker, Eldon’s car is a stick shift and though she’s driven one before it’s a struggle to keep it all together.

“Jack?”

“Airport.”

“On it.”

.....

Over the tannoy the announcement causes the small group to shift. Miriam looks at her boss,

“Sir? I’m sorry. I think we have to..”

She trails off and Hannibal nods briefly. They all stand up from the chairs around the table. No one is spelling it out but Abigail has realised there is an undercurrent of tension between them all. And where is her daddy? Wasn’t he supposed to be here? She remembers the present,

“Hannibal! I nearly forgot! I’ve got your gift, you should take it with you. You can open it on the plane. Or at the other end. When you get back to your other home.”

She smiles at him and holds out the carrier bag with the wrapped present inside it. Hannibal smiles back at her.

“For me? Just for me?”

She nods and then puts her arms round him, he crouches down beside her and returns the hug,

“My darling girl. My sweet. I shall be back so soon. You will hardly have time to notice.”

“I will notice. I will.”

She can’t stop a few tears from falling, and Hannibal doesn’t admonish her for it. Though he manages not to join in. Just.

Mischa ducks down beside them both and joins in the hug, Hannibal eases back and lets Mischa take his place.

Miriam hikes her bag over her shoulder and then holds Hannibal’s out to him. He takes it reluctantly, casts an eye back to the entrance and sighs.

“All right. Mischa. My darling, I love you. Please...”

She nods,

“Of course.”

And then he and Miriam are gone.

.....

At the entrance to the airport Bev pulls up and uses her badge to park somewhere deeply inappropriate. She waits for Jack and Preller. When they arrive a few minutes later she thinks it's possible they broke a number of speeding laws to get to the airport so fast.

Jack pulls himself out of the SUV,

"Any sign?"

"Not yet. Jack? I'm going to see if can catch Hannibal. Let him know what's happening. Don't you think?"

Jack looks at his watch,

"I think we might be too late."

Bev swears and takes off running into the airport.

.....

At the gate Hannibal looks back one last time and then smiles as he approaches the desk when he realises it is Georgia on duty, she smiles at him,

"Colonel Lecter! Good to see you! And you'll be glad to hear we've got space for you in business too."

She smiles at Miriam,

"You too Ma'am."

Hannibal looks back at the door again, he hesitates for a moment and then says,

"Georgia, it's just possible my partner might try and come and say goodbye. He got caught up in something. I know it's unorthodox but..."

"Dr Graham? I remember. He's FBI isn't he?"

Hannibal nods. She smiles.

"Well. I shouldn't really. But if he gets here before they move the walkway. Well. I'll see what Mr Wells says."

Miriam smiles tightly at her boss, she suspects he's working very hard not to show how upset he is.

Hannibal looks back one last time and then smiles at Miriam,

"Shall we Private?"

"Sir."

And then they're both gone through the last set of doors before the walkway down to the plane.

.....
At the roadway outside the entrance to the departures lounge Jack realises the car barrelling towards him is Will's. He and the small security team he's cornered get ready to advance on it. When Will screeches to a halt he just has time to call to Jack as he runs inside,

"Don't be too hard on him. It's all a big mistake, I'll be back."

Jack waves him on, but Will is gone before he even really registers anything Jack does.

When he sees Mischa and Abigail with Bev he runs to them,

"I am so sorry. I'll explain later. Bev! God. I'll be back. I'm going to try and get them to let me through."

Mischa is about to ask him how when she sees him fumble for his wallet and FBI credentials. Maybe that will work? She watches him get through the first set of security. Maybe it will.

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Mischa looks at Beverly, she glances down at Abigail, Bev looks between them,

“Well Hello Mischa! This is all very exciting isn’t it? So, with any luck Will will get all the way through and everything will be completely fine.”

Mischa looks at Bev and then raises one eyebrow,

“Exciting? For sure. Definitely. How exciting would you say exactly?”

“Oh really exceptionally exciting. Exciting like you wouldn’t believe, exciting. More exciting I think than you could possibly imagine, that kind of exciting.”

Mischa raises the other eyebrow,

“Really? That exciting?”

Bev sighs and puts a serious hand on her shoulder whilst she holds out her other hand towards Abigail,

“Honestly? I mean honestly, really and truly? You have no idea.”

Abigail looks between the two adults, both of whom are now holding one of her hands. She’s not daft, she knows something is going on.

“Bev? Why was daddy so late?”

Bev looks down at her,

“You know what Abs, I’m gonna let your daddy explain to both you and Mischa when he gets back. Ok? How about we grab a milkshake while we wait?”

Abigail’s eyes go round,

“Really?”

.....

At the front of the airport Jimmy and Jack wait for Randall to exit Will’s car. Jack has his gun out, no one knows if Tier is armed or, if he is, with what. Brian slows as he arrives on foot from where he’s parked the SUV.

“He getting out anytime today?”

Jack shrugs,

“I think he’s considering his options.”

Brian snorts and goes round to the passenger’s side of the car, he drags open the door,

“Get the fuck out. You’ve run us a merry dance. You got a gun? I’m so pissed right now I don’t even care. Get out. Come on. Get out.”

Randall looks up at him,

“I said to Will I was really sorry.”

“Yeah? Great. Will’s a damn sight nicer than I am. Get out Dr Tier. If Will missed Hannibal and didn’t get there in time, so help me, I might accidentally have to let your face fall on by hand. Multiple fucking times.”

“I didn’t know.”

It comes out as a whine. Brian snorts his annoyance,

“Oh, I’m sorry, since when is not knowing an excuse to stalk someone, harass their colleagues, insert themselves into an investigation, kidnap someone, and piss off a whole FBI team. Come on. Get out.”

Randall slides out of the car and Brian restrains himself when he turns him around, pats him down and gets some zip cuffs on him. He pulls him up to standing up straight,

“Jack? For gods sake take him, I’m so pissed right now.”

Jimmy and Jack look at him in surprise,

“What? You think I’m overreacting?”

Jack shakes his head,

“Not at all, you just usually under-react if anything.”

“Yeah? Not about this. If it was Jimmy? Fuck.”

Jack and Jimmy look at Randall. Yeah, he’s not popular all round. Jack looks around for some security or PD, he beckons a uniform over.

“We want him. Kidnapping of an FBI agent. Get someone to take him? Yeah?”

Jack has his ‘I’m this close’ face on, so the PD doesn’t argue and hauls Randall away. Jimmy is impressed when Brian doesn’t fling a ‘later’ after him. And shrugs when Brian then follows the officer to a car, just to make sure they don’t lose him or something stupid. Slippery little shit.

.....

At the entrance to the plane Miriam and Hannibal have to wait as someone using a stick is supported into the craft. The queue down the aircraft is slow, lots of people, lots of hand luggage, and lots of minor squabbling to get everything stowed. The two stewards in coach, Roman and another guy Hannibal doesn’t recognise try to be as patient and helpful as possible. It takes them both several minutes to get through the seats in coach and into business.

Seated just across the aisle from each other Hannibal helps Miriam put her luggage overhead and then stows his own bag under the seat in front. As he sorts out the things he wants for the first bit of

the flight he resists the temptation to check his phone. There's no point in knowing how close Will got. The thing is, he isn't here, and really that is all that matters.

.....

In one of the corridors Will runs alongside a slow moving travelator. Damn. He's going to take up running again, even if it means getting a treadmill, this is killing him. When he gets to the final companion way before the gate he realises he must have taken a wrong turn. So he has to run back. Fuck it. Two minutes later he's back where he began and instead of turning into the corridor goes down some short steps and runs almost straight into the final gate. The attendant, an older man whom Will thinks he met on the flight back from Paris looks up at him in surprise.

"Sir. I'm very sorry, but boarding has closed. You're too late."

"Fuck. I don't want to get on the plane."

He tries to catch his breath and holds up the FBI badge, the attendant takes a deep breath,

"Oh my. Well there's a thing."

His phone crackles.

.....

In the cafe they'd been in earlier Abigail sits drinking milkshake number two whilst Bev and Mischa try to convey by means of eyebrow semaphore and lip reading some of what has just occurred. Mischa tries French, Bev tries Korean. Mischa tries Japanese and they have the most confusing conversation where Mischa thinks Beverly is trying to tell her that Will was kidnapped. But that's just ridiculous.

Isn't it?

.....

Lawrence Wells listens to Georgia on the phone, he nods, nods again, nods, and sighs,

"All right Dr Graham. We can try. Come on."

He points Will down some short steep steps and Will grabs his hand, shakes it and runs onto the bouncy walkway that joins up to the plane. The door at the other end is being closed even as he shouts at them to wait. Badge in hand in front of him.

.....

Jack and Jimmy walk across the departures lounge towards Mischa, Abigail and Bev. Mischa looks up at them and blinks. This isn't quite what she'd expected, she looks sharply at Bev. But surely that's impossible?

"Abigail! Honey! I am so pleased to see you, can you come and help me choose a muffin for Brian, he'll be here in a moment?"

Abigail hops out of her seat to pull Jimmy over to the counter and Mischa waits about five seconds before hissing,

“What on earth is going on?”

Jack sighs, rubs a hand over his face,

“Will was kidnapped. Talked his way out of it. We think it was the guy who has been stalking the team.”

Mischa frowns,

“What stalker?”

“The guy who kidnapped Will? Works with Eldon?”

“This isn’t the flower thing?”

Jack nods, a wry look on his face,

“This is the flower thing. And the messages, and the letters, and the all round weirdness, and now, the kidnap.”

“And this is about Will?”

“The best answer is..” he pauses, not for effect but because he’s trying to think of the most honest answer, “yes, no, and maybe.”

Mischa looks horrified,

“What?”

.....

At the door of the plane Will hears someone on the other side say to hold on. It’s pushed back and he’s allowed to slide through, the attendant is definitely someone he met before, Roman? Yeah. Roman.

“Georgia just called us. And Mr Wells. It’s your husband right? Leaving for deployment?”

Will is still fighting to get his breath back,

“Sorry. I ran all the way. Some. Shit. Some stupid case thing.”

Roman grins,

“Tell me this is either some super spy case stuff, or some epic romance.”

Will almost manages a smile,

“That’s the CIA, Sorry, I’m FBI. But we can go with epic romance. I won’t see him again for six months.”

“Awesome.” Laughs Roman, “come with me, soldier yeah? Colonel. Damn fine in a uniform?”

“Oh yeah. Just great.”

Will doesn't roll his eyes because really this is above and beyond what he thought was possible. Roman grins and starts to walk up the cabin, he turns and looks back at Will,

"Come on, you've got maybe three minutes, though we might stretch to five while we do the safety announcements. Ok? Come with me. They're in business."

Wordlessly Will follows. There's no time to get his act together, to get his breath back, to manage any semblance of normal. No time for any of that.

.....

At the cafe Mischa suddenly asks,

"Did anyone tell Hannibal what was happening? He thought.."

The group look at him and then at each other. Bev makes a face,

"I was kind of driving a stick shift."

"I was just driving."

"I was shouting at the tech at the lab."

Jimmy sighs,

"The short answer is no. I think none of us did. Damn."

They pause. And slowly she says,

"Ok. If Will doesn't make it then he'll call Hannibal. I could text him to say he's coming, that he's trying. But I won't say why he was delayed."

Abigail pipes up from what may be the third milkshake or the fourth,

"Why was he delayed?"

They all look at her.

.....

In business class Miriam remembers the book in her coat in the overhead locker so she gets up to retrieve it and casually glances back down the plane, she suddenly smiles incredibly widely especially when Will sees her and smiles back,

"Sir!"

Hannibal looks up but it's not Miriam he sees but Will.

"Oh. Oh. My darling Will. Oh."

"Don't even ask. Fucking hell. Remind me to buy a treadmill."

There might be a few delicate ahems or ooohs in business class, but everyone there is a world weary traveller so a delicate tender and impassioned embrace is old hat to them. Mostly. Never the

less several people ask Hannibal later about the story behind the brief but intense few moments of intimacy they witness.

“Only six months.”

“No time at all.”

“Be careful.”

“Email me with what actually happened.”

“It really doesn’t matter.”

“You’re right. It certainly doesn’t.”

“I love you.”

“And I you. I’ll miss you.”

“I know. I’m really sorry.”

“It matters not at all. My love.”

“Dr Graham? Colonel. I’m really sorry. Gotta break it up now.”

Reluctantly, so reluctantly Hannibal lets Will go, Will ducks back and presses a quick and quiet kiss to his lips, smiling now.

“Soon.”

And then he’s gone. And the curtain between business and coach obscures his exit.

Hannibal sits back down and readies himself for the taxi-ing on to the tarmac and take-off.

There’s no announcement, no one explains the interlude where the man with glasses and curly hair was allowed on to the plane so briefly and then off again.

As the plane nears the end of the run way ready to turn and take off Miriam reaches across the aisle and puts her hand over her boss’s, he squeezes back, closes his eyes. Rests his head against the headrest. Breathes.

Once they’re in the air, Miriam lets go.

.....

As Will makes his way back through the airport he has to explain his reverse passage. The badge gets him all the way. He doesn’t see Lawrence Wells or Georgia, but he makes a mental note to send them a fuck-off big thank you present. As he passes through security he makes a joke with the guys there.

In the lobby he looks around and then sees Jack standing and waving over by the cafe. They all look at him expectantly.

“They let me on the plane.”

Mischa grabs him into a hug and sobs in French.

“Tell me what this is about being fucking kidnapped.

He hugs her back hard.

“God. All right. Abigail, sweetheart? Do you want a milkshake.”

Abigail shakes her head hard,

“I’ve had four. I feel a bit sick. But maybe a muffin?”

Will simply laughs.

“Right now? Honestly? You can have whatever the heck you want.”

.....

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 84

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mischa looks at Will's hands clutched tight around the mug he is holding, she reaches over and lightly touches the back of his wrist. Even so she can't miss the slight jump he makes.

"Will? I can leave the rental here? That Abigail and I drove here in. I can drive us back. To your house? Would that be all right?"

He glances up at her, and his eyes skid away, oh she thinks. Not so good.

"It would be no trouble and honestly? I want to be able to tell Hannibal I did. Will you let me?"

She feels slight pressure under the table from one of Bev's feet, just on the top of her toes, gentle. Not the only one who has noticed then. Bev leans over and takes Will's mug from him and sets it down on the table.

"Good plan, huh Will? That way you can sit in the back with Abigail and take deep breaths and shit. I'm coming with by the way. Jims? You and Bri can sort Eldon's car can't you?"

Brian nods and holds out his hands for the keys.

"Of course. Jack? You got the SuV?"

They play musical keys for a minute and Bev and Mischa exchange looks. Abigail looks round the grown ups at the table with her. She climbs out of her seat and climbs onto Will's lap. He buries his head in her hair when she puts her arms round his neck. He wraps her up tight.

"Daddy."

"Shhh. I know. It's. Ok. It's all ok."

"Apart from Hannibal?"

"Yes Abs. Apart from that."

Everyone looks away as both Abigail and Will cry into each other's necks.

.....

Shortly before they land in Frankfurt for a short layover Hannibal stops Roman and asks if he has any further information about Will's lateness. Roman grins at him,

"Hey, Colonel, gotta say, we've never done that before. Total romance and everything! Mr Wells called from the gate, made some joke that your husband got totally kidnapped on the way to the airport. Awesome! Honestly? We'd probably have let him through with just the badge. Drama didn't hurt though. I expect the pictures will hit social media even before we land."

He's about to head down the cabin when Miriam reaches across the aisle and taps Roman on the arm,

"What do you mean a joke about being kidnapped?"

Roman looks between her and Colonel Lecter,

"It was just a joke? He was explaining to Georgia at the first gate about why he was so late. Then he said something to Mr Wells yeah? Just a joke."

Miriam looks at her boss,

"Sir. He was all right. We can find out when we land. I'm sure it's.."

She tails off. She knows some of what has been happening lately, the stalker, the media coverage, the killer. She knows the quiet dangers Will might be exposed to in his work. The quiet dangers Will and Abigail have already been exposed to. Just randomly. Not bad luck, not chance, not fate, just the random act of someone operating outside conventional definitions of logic.

Roman looks at her,

"Hey, come on. Tell me it was a joke."

Neither Hannibal or Miriam answer for a moment then Hannibal rallies, perhaps mindful of Roman's comment about social media.

"And a successful one. As you let him through. Quite right. And Miriam, not to worry. I think any concern on Will's part might be explained by his worry over missing us. I sure the traffic was terrible."

Miriam gives him the most sardonic look he has ever seen mustered by a subordinate, she hasn't bought anything he has said in the least. He's rather pleased about that.

.....

The security detail at the airport and the local PD clearly made good on their word as by the time Jack gets back to Quantico Randall Tier has already been secured in an interrogation room. For a short while Jack stands on one side of a two way mirror just observing.

In short, Randall is a sweating and collapsing mess of a man. Jack watches as he tries to pick up the plastic cup of water he's been given. Most of it spills and ends up on the table top he has been shackled to. He doesn't look like a criminal mastermind or serial killer, but if the job has taught him anything, no one does until they have you back up against some shelving with a bit of glass stuck in your neck your fingers slippery with the blood trying every way to leave your body fast. Gasping like a fish caught out of season. Surprised.

One of the techs comes into the room and hands Jack a folder, Jack raises his eye brows at the woman,

"What's this?"

"Phone records. Screenshots of CCTV we think we've got him on, in a florist, might be him. Photograph from an ATM near a UPS depot. He paid in cash for a delivery, fake name, but we think

he got the money there. That ones him for sure. Couple of other things."

"This is all the stalker business? Anything to connect him to the rest of it?"

The tech grimaces,

"We're still on it. But so far? He bought one moth, and that's it. Might be the one that came in the delivery. Someone's gone for his laptop and work desktop."

Jack nods at her and then starts to flip through the file. He looks round the room. In one corner a printer and desktop sit idling, so he takes some blank paper from the feed and puts it in the folder. It now looks ridiculously full of something. Something he hopes Tier will necessarily construe as bad.

He rolls his shoulders, takes one final glance at Tier through the two way mirror and then heads out of the room.

It's only moments later that Randall Tier looks up from his puddle of spilled water, sees Jack and crumpled into his seat even further.

If this is an act, Jack's gotta say, it's one of the best he's ever seen.

.....

Will is quiet all the way home and Abigail curls tightly around him in the back of the car. Bev sits up front whilst Mischa drives. Whatever they might say is kept under wraps until they're safely home.

By the time they arrive Abigail is almost asleep and Will has to be helped from the car he can't stop shaking.

Indoors, Mischa carries Abigail into the house and Bev dumps Will on the sofa, wraps a throw around him, and then holds up a hand,

"Babe? No argument right? I'm gonna call Frederick? Get him to bring something. This isn't ok? It could be shock, I get that. Or it might have triggered the PTSD. Yeah? All right Will? Then I'll call Molly, because I'll stay tonight. Mischa, you staying or you gotta go?"

Mischa looks at her,

"Stay. Hannibal would want me to, and I want to as well."

Bev nods at her, a glint of approval in her face,

"Good. We look after each other right? Will? Ok?"

Will just about managed albeit through gritted teeth,

"Shock and maybe the PTSD again. I think so. Mischa what did you do with Abigail? Is she alright?"

He makes to get up from the sofa and she sits down beside him and slowly pulls him a little closer, he leans into her, and she carefully strokes his hair, waiting to see if he tenses or pulls away, he doesn't, so she soothes,

"I put her to bed, she was practically asleep, it's ok. She doesn't know. Thinks it's just about Hannibal."

"I wish he was here."

She kisses his hair and he wraps an arm round her a little,

"I know. I know Will. Me too. Bev's calling Dr Chilton, then Molly, then we're going to eat something. Then we'll email Hannibal. He's bound to be wondering."

Will nods, gulps a little, let's a few tears slide down his face,

"Thanks."

"Shhh." She says, "it's nothing, you're my brother and I love you."

She holds on tight while he cries some more.

When Frederick arrives he kneels in front of Will, gets the gist of what's happened and sends him straight to bed with a sedative coursing round his system. Back in the living room he looks at Bev and Mischa soberly,

"This might set him back a little. Bev can you and the team fix for someone to be here for a few days whilst we support Will? Ms Lecter, Mischa? You're going back to Europe aren't you?"

Mischa nods,

"I may be able to extend it. If anything counts as a family emergency this does. I'll call my boss."

She looks at her watch,

"I'll call my boss tomorrow. I wasn't due in until the end of next week. I'll see if I can get an extra ten days or so."

She pauses,

"They're supposed to go back home this weekend."

He nods,

"Actually, that could be for the best. Things he and Abigail knows, not too many physical reminders that Hannibal isn't here."

Mischa can see the point.

"All right. Makes sense to me. Thank you."

Frederick goes to the kitchen to speak to Bev and leaves with a handshake and a smile,

"I'll be back. Tomorrow."

Mischa smiles as she shuts the door and then looks at Bev, drying her hands on a tea-towel in the doorway.

“I have to email Hannibal, will you help me?”

.....

A considerable way away from Bev, Jack, and even Jimmy and Brian in Washington having a meal with Eldon Stammetts, himself still somewhat in shock, Roland Umber sits waiting for his appointment. His mom reads some lame magazine from a pile on the table clearly left for those with no imagination whatsoever.

He looks round the waiting room. Travel posters. Information about various services and products, monetising illness and injury and all kinds of conditions, he snorts to himself, half indignant and half grudging admiration. They’re a little early for his slot so they just have to wait. He rolls his eyes when he sees the receptionist frown at him when he takes out his cell. So he puts it back in his jacket pocket.

His mom is smiling at something she’s reading so he gives in and checks the pile of magazines. He’s pleasantly surprised to find two natural history magazines, one on lepidoptery. Maybe cashing in on a popular film franchise he wonders? He hasn’t seen it, doesn’t want to get annoyed by all the mistakes they make.

He sits back in his chair and adjusts his glasses, Really they’re ok, but his mom worries, so. Well, he’s here isn’t he? He settles in to read and is almost disappointed when the optometrist calls his name.

.....

Jack walks out of the interrogation room, goes back to his office and unlocks his much abused and picked bottom right desk drawer. From inside he pulls out a bottle of bourbon and a glass. Once he’s poured he calls Bella to say he’ll be a little late, takes a long drink and then opens up his tablet to write up his report.

Although really he’d quite like to go for succinct he fills in all the fields of the template they have for such matters. It takes about an hour. And really what it comes down to is that Randall Tier is an idiot, a really fucking stupid one, who he can definitely charge and will, but, at base, is mostly just a sad individual who escalated his own behaviour until it had got utterly out of hand and away from him. Jack looks at the bottle. Damn. That’s probably three fingers down.

He’ll have to get a taxi. Oh for fucks sake.

.....

Miriam calls his attention to a WiFi hotspot in the airport, and then offers to get coffee and muffins, or related bread products. Hannibal is grateful for her discretion, as he sits he watches her walk smartly away and then he pulls his tablet out of its cover.

It takes a few frustrating minutes and attempts to get into the airport’s supposedly free internet access and Hannibal can’t help but wonder which particular hell he has just sold his information to when the tablet announces it is done prevaricating and he is now connected.

In his email account there are messages from Jimmy, Frederick and from Mischa. It's her's that he clicks on first, his face deepening in concentration and consternation as he reads.

He clicks onto both Frederick and Jimmy's emails in turn and then re-reads the message from Mischa.

Damn.

.....

Chapter End Notes

And this week I shall be in Toronto at Fannibal Fest! There will be stories and chapters and all kinds of things. And two very long flights as I'm in the U.K. and flights mean writing!

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 85

Out on the porch of the rental house Will and Frederick are still talking. Whilst they sit out there drinking a third cup of coffee for Frederick and tea for Will, Bev and Molly sit in the living room and Mischa is in the kitchen talking on her cell to Hannibal.

“He is much better this morning. Frederick Chilton is here now. Abigail has gone to school. She knows something happened, because he was so late, but not the detail of it.”

She listens quietly for a while,

“I think so. Frederick’s been here maybe an hour? And Jack Crawford called this morning first thing. He’s seen the man.”

As Hannibal speaks she traces her fingers through the water spilled on the counter too, slowly the shape morphs into a flower, nothing complex, just some petals and leaves.

“They think Tier was just the stalker. He was behind the notes and flowers and the moth that was delivered to the lab. But not the emails. And not the murders. Agent Crawford says he picked up on the moth just to garner a little more attention. He wanted to be taken seriously.”

He speaks some more. She sighs,

“Honestly Hannibal, it’s a mess. Some of it was some kind of infatuation I think, from what Agent Crawford said. Some of it was because he got passed over in some recruitment round at the bureau. Some of it? I don’t know? Maybe because he felt powerful? And the thing with Will? Crawford’s charging him with abduction, but they think that if Bev had been in the lab at the right moment it might have been her he took. And really? Who knows how that might have ended?”

They talk for another few minutes and when she finishes the call she walks into the living room. Molly looks up at her,

“Is Hannibal all right? He knows we’re thinking of him doesn’t he?”

Mischa lets herself drop into one of the chairs that came with the rental. When Winston comes and leans against her panting lightly she lets a hand trail through the rough hair at the dog’s neck.

“Thank you. Yes. It sounds like Miriam has been very helpful. And the chaplain from the base who is a friend met them off the plane. Hannibal has also spoken with Tobias. He’s travelling today? Did you remember? He’s going to drop by before he leaves.”

Mischa looks at the two women, then cranes to try and see through the front windows,

“Is Will still with Frederick? Do they need anything?”

“Give him a bit of time. I heard them laugh a few minutes ago. It think it’s helping.”

Mischa closes her eyes, breathes sharply,

“Do you think he’ll be ok?”

Bev wrinkles her nose,

“Long term? Ultimately? Yes. Short term? Like the next few weeks? It’s hard to say. Sometimes once the immediate danger is passed people have this delayed reaction, but bounce back later. Will reacted pretty promptly. That can be good. I don’t really know. It’s not always about resilience, or context. Or even history. Whatever shit is going on?”

“So it’s very unpredictable then.”

“Sorry, yes, mostly.”

“And the rest of us?”

Bev smiles a little sadly,

“We can get you a slot with Fred too. If you like? Molly talks to him now and again.”

Mischa eyes them both,

“Yes? Is it useful?”

Molly leans forwards on the sofa,

“I’m still here, and relatively together.”

Bev pokes her in the side, but Molly carries on,

“Mischa? Hannibal is a front-line soldier. Is this really so much worse?”

Mischa opens her mouth to say that it’s not the same thing, but maybe Molly knows better. Maybe it is like that for them. Maybe this is what all front lines are like, for all of them, families and friends too. Always.

.....

Miss Bloom watches as Abigail closes her exercise book and sets her pencil down. She fiddles with her locket, pulling it from side to side on the chain at her neck. Alana hopes she will put it away without the need for her to remind her to do so. She’d rather not have to, she knows something of what has happened in the last 24 hours, one sorrow foreseen, the other very much not.

She watches as Abigail opens the locket and stares at the pictures within. She closes it and tucks it back inside the collar of her shirt. She looks down at her desk and sets her hands either side of the exercise book.

Miss Bloom waits to see what, if anything, might happen next.

.....

Tobias checks his luggage in and then walks through to the departure lounge. Frankie has to work so there are no sad goodbyes. He’s already had one emotionally charged moment today. Fucking hell. Poor Dr Graham. Will. Damn. What a thing, a hell of a thing. Terrible.

He pats his bag; ticket, passport, boarding pass, a cushion thing for the shit long journey, god he hopes the films will be ok on the in-flight. And, tucked carefully inside his travel document folder there is a letter from Will Graham for the Colonel. Maybe a card from Abigail too. Though he knows that just for once it's the letter that the Colonel will be most concerned with this time.

He's had the story now. From Mischa and Will, even though the Colonel gave him the edited highlights when he asked Tobias to go by the house to see if he really was as all right as everyone promised. And at least this is something that Tobias can do for his boss. Who is always doing everything he can for his staff.

He stretches. Ok. Stop in Frankfurt, short layover. Change planes. Onwards. It's not the worst thing in the world.

.....

In the evening after supper Will, Mischa and Abigail pack the last of the boxes. All things being equal Mason and Dragon will bring the truck along in the morning and they will make the move back to their own house.

Will pauses,

"After tomorrow Mischa? You should go back to Bedelia. Or Washington at least. Honestly, we can manage."

"This isn't about managing Will. She's not expecting me to. I can stay Will. It isn't a problem. I've been given another week, ten days even."

He looks down at the plates he's slowly enveloping in bubble-wrap resisting the temptation to wring it between his hands for the satisfying cascade of pops it'd make.

"I'd like it Mischa. But you don't have to. Really. Why not save the holiday up. For when Hannibal is back."

"For a week then?"

"You think he'd be upset with you?"

"He'd be upset if I didn't want to. But I do Will. And it's for me not him. Though he won't be sorry. But I meant what I said."

He smiles at her, and for all that she knows he is probably medicated right now she still trusts that smile. She trusts Will.

.....

Randall Tier sits opposite Frederick Chilton. His hands are shackled to the table between them. And he is now detained under some mental health legislation rather than being simply arrested. And Frederick is going through the somewhat delicate business of unravelling the trauma from the trouble.

The director of the Baltimore Hospital for the Criminally Insane is a friend and sometime confidant of Frederick's, they've even been known to socialise readily, to share ideas and treatment plans, albeit that Frederick plays his FBI credentials and work close to his chest.

A little later Dr Cordell hands Frederick a cup of tea in a delicate bone china cup. Frederick smiles and takes it as his colleague sits down.

“Of course we’ll keep an eye on him. We’re not monsters here.”

Frederick smiles,

“Not even the Staff?”

Cordell sniffs,

“Oh Fred. Have you been reading that tabloid reporter? Freddie Lounds is it? Come off it, it’s not like that, we’re not like that. Not now.”

They grin at each other. Under the previous director, conditions, staffing, treatment, therapy and medication regimes, all had been different. Now though? Cordell is all about managing expectations and needs. Of the patients. Of the families. Of the Staff. And just occasionally, when it’s relevant, the families of the victims of his patients. None if it is easy, most of it isn’t popular either. But despite this he’s had some satisfying and significant breakthroughs in both patient care and treatment. Even his staff seem to like him. Even some of the patients. Which is something.

“Fair enough. You’ll keep me appraised?”

“Of course. What’s Agent Crawford’s timetable?”

“Ah well. When I know that, I’ll let you know. All right?”

“And he won’t come in here making demands and shouting?”

“Ah. Yes. Well. That’s a little harder to promise I’m afraid.”

Cordell smiles,

“We shall just have to do what we can.”

“As always.”

“As ever.”

.....

Abigail holds Tentacles out to her daddy,

“A kiss. Properly.”

Will kisses Tentacles on the forehead. Though it’s hard to tell which bit that is.

“And the Kitties?”

“They’re already packed.”

“Shall I kiss the idea of them?”

Abigail looks at him seriously, a small frown between her eyes,

“They don’t have to be here to be real.”

Will smiles, recognising a conversation he and Abigail had had about when Hannibal would leave and what it would be like for them without him there,

“Real like the daisies Abs?”

She smiles back,

“Real like I love you.”

.....

On the flight onwards from Frankfurt Tobias manages to get some well earned sleep. The first leg had been bad with some terrible choices on the in-flight entertainment console. Which he’d never the less cycled through wondering if he was losing IQ points even as he did so. Certain that he was losing the will to live.

Some of it was the frustration he’d felt over one particular programme. He had spent maybe two hours trying to get into a series about the origins of the BAU wondering as he watched what the people he’d met who actually worked there thought of it, if they’d even seen it, or if any of them had consulted for it. He’d checked the credits but they’d been truncated. Probably some deal with the airline. It bothered him somehow.

And the airport itself was as awful as ever. Not specifically because it was Frankfurt. Just. Airports in general. He’s always hated the fact that they are called terminals. If that isn’t as depressing as shit. Who wants to think about endings when they’re getting on a plane?

Now though? Somewhere over the Arabian peninsula? He’s asleep. The neck pillow is much more effective than he’d expected and he’s even made a note to remind himself to thank Frankie for it next time he emails. It’s the little things isn’t it? That make up a happy life and love. He’d thought about the Colonel and Will Graham. Not just the little things of course. Sometimes it’s the big things too.

.....

A little too late that night Jack kisses Bella’s hand,

“Light off? Or do you want to read a little longer?”

“I’m not so tired. Maybe another ten minutes or so.”

“Sure. I might even read some myself.”

She smiles,

“Still on chapter two?”

It’s a running joke between them. It’s so rare for Jack to get enough down time to do any actual reading he’s started the book that sits on the bedside cabinet at least five times, maybe six. And he never gets beyond chapter two. Tiredness overtakes him. Or it’s just too late, or she doesn’t feel well enough for the light to stay on. The halogen hurting her eyes even on a low setting. Or they

talk. Or they don't talk. Neither of them mention that at some point he might have enough time on his hands to read the damn thing.

Bella though has read the book.

"You want me to remind you of the story?"

"Maybe you should just read it to me."

"Now there's an idea. Would you like that?"

He hands it over, takes off his own glasses, battles with the pillows and settles down. She smiles at him and starts off.

She reads for maybe ten minutes. Just to the end of chapter one. When she looks down at him he's already asleep.

She closes the book, sets it on her own night stand. Switches off the lights.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 86

Chapter Notes

> I met an amazing bunch of wonderful people at Fannibal Fest in Toronto.. this chapter is warmly offered to them as a thank you.

In the morning all the boxes are packed and ready for the Dragon and Mason. Even without Miriam's meticulous labelling they've managed pretty well. Mischa is almost as efficient in this respect too.

Will is still holding it all together. Just about. And he can certainly manage a good job in front of his brother-in-law. Even when Mason asks,

"hell of a week then?"

Will smiles a little,

"I've known worse."

His brother-in-law smiles.

"Well sure. Of course you have. But each event is its own thing, you know, discreet. Sounds like it was bad enough just on its own Will."

Will shrugs. He is trying to find a way to get into proportion. 'No one died' he keeps thinking, 'no one died and no one was actually hurt either'. It's not the worst thing that can happened, could happen or indeed has happened. It's just. He's struggling a little with it. Maybe once Hannibal has seen the letter and responded he'll manage a little better. Feel safer. Feel all right.

It's just? Well, it's just that he hadn't seen it coming, and really, he feels like he should have. It's not like they'd had no idea about Randall, that he might be at least tangentially connected, to some bit of the case. Or perhaps, loosely tied in is more accurate? And it's not like Will hasn't come up against the most normal seeming of people who've done unspeakable things. Just the worst. So he knows that some small treacherous part of him is digging in his side, reminding him that he should have been more careful and that really, he should have damn well known.

Of course Frederick had done everything he could to remind Will not to blame the victim which damn and blast in this case just happened to be himself. But it's so much easier when it's someone else? Isn't it? But Fred had persevered and it had helped some, for sure. And so have the brief conversations with practically every single one of their friends and really even the 120 seconds, and yes he timed it, with Hannibal at some god forsaken hour had helped too. Especially as it was an excuse to be awake at stupid o'clock when he couldn't have slept anyway.

Truth be told, he's a bit worried about not sleeping. It's a sign that things are going down hill, even if it takes time for his conscious brain to catch up to what his subconscious is trying to tell him

through a whole range of physical cues; disrupted sleep, headaches, eye problems, auditory hallucinations the full sensory works. He knows now, when he spots it that it means the PTSD is flaring up. So he sighs at Mason,

“We should grab a hot drink before we head out. Did you and Dragon have breakfast on the way or do you want to have some here? Mischa makes a mean waffle.”

“She still here? How long for?”

“She’s going to be here for another week.”

Mason smiles brightly,

“Hey, that’s good, Will, isn’t it? Don’t you think?”

Will tries not to shrug it off. He might want her to be here with them, but hates the reasons that underpin her decision to stay. He’s worried too that he’s being more obviously flakey about the whole thing than he’d like. Stuff that he’d rather keep private all out there for everyone to pick over. But he knows that’s just a little paranoia, another function of the ptsd. And he worries that conversely he might also be actually losing it a little. Maybe. So he knows that actually? He’s a bit of a mess. Despite the support, and despite the help. Just a bit.

.....

Jack sits opposite Frederick Chilton in Fred’s small office in the Quantico building,

“How’s Tier now?”

“Well, they’re keeping an eye out. He’s devolved fast. I think the kidnap finally pushed him over an edge he barely knew he was on. You still intent on prosecuting him Jack?”

Jack waggles his head a little,

“Unless there’s a really good reason why not. Then yeah. We will be. Hell of a precedent otherwise. But if you come up with a reason I promise I’ll at least think about it. But he scared Will badly. And the rest of us. And that’s just the personal side of it. It’s a good job the Colonel isn’t here.”

“You think he’d react badly? He’s an intelligent man Jack.”

Jack just looks at him and Frederick concedes,

“Fair enough. Stupid thing to say really. Sorry. He doesn’t take things very lightly. I think that’s part of the thing that works so well between them.”

“For sure. Hannibal is one of the most serious and earnest men I’ve ever met. Even if he does seem softer with Will.”

Frederick smiles,

“He’s a peach with Abigail.”

Jack quirks a smile,

“Sure. That’s true. But she’d melt all but the hardest heart.”

Frederick nods,

“I’m expecting, or at least, I’m anticipating a little push back from her at some point. I mentioned it to Will.”

“Yeah? Of what sort?”

“Probably at school. I think that’s where she’s most likely to act out. She’s protective of Will. They’re the right kind of tight at home.”

“You talked to her?”

“A little. She doesn’t like the tension. And for the record Will said I could talk about her with you, where it pertained to him and this situation.”

Jack nods, Fred is pretty careful about boundaries so it’s good to know he’s mindful.

“So, what else with her?”

“She misses Hannibal badly. Already. That’s not going to get easier any time soon. She thinks he could have protected Will if he hadn’t been on his way out.”

Jack makes a face,

“Ok. That’s not great.”

Frederick nods a solemn agreement.

.....

When Tobias hands over the letter Hannibal resists interrogating his Sargeant over the condition of his family when he saw them last.

He also manages the courtesy of enquiring about Tobias’ journey and goes through the various tasks he has lined up for his Sargeant once Tobjas has had some time to recover from the nightmarishly long flight.

Never the less as soon as he can Hannibal politely excuses himself and heads to the modestly private haven of his own tent. He is rather sorry to discover that his hands are trembling as he opens Will’s letter, and that he has to steel himself to make a start on it,

>Dear Hannibal,

I’m all right. That’s the most important thing. And nothing too bad happened. I was frightened, and maybe a little mad. At myself, partly, for not anticipating it, but mostly at Randall. Ok? I got that bit right. Mostly at Randall.

I’ll admit, I’m still a little shaken by it. How easy it was for everything to go sideways so fast. It reminded me of when you had the suicide bomb on the base. Everything is fine, and then, out of

nowhere, it isn't. So I'm counting the days now really. Until you're back.

I know I'm going to worry. I did say I would, that I do. I'm sorry. I'll try and keep it manageable. I honestly will. And I've fixed up to talk to Frederick some more too. He's been good so far. And I'll stick to it I promise. He's given me sedatives. I'm not wild about it but they do help. Even if the dreams are shit; all the worst outcomes? That kind of thing. But I know I need to sleep. I know. So I'll take them for a bit at least.

God, I miss you so much already it hurts. Honestly. The simple pain of it. And that goddam truncated good bye on the plane? That's what I want to kill Randall for. Not the fucking kidnap! And yeah, even I can see that it was all, I don't know, Casablanca? And so on. But I don't need Grand drama. I really don't. Did I say that before? I want the opposite of drama. I just want you. Safe. Here. I know that makes me a little possessive and a little selfish, but I honestly don't care.

Hannibal, please, be careful. Please. I know, I should have been. I know it. I will be. I promise.

Jack has me off on mandatory leave for the next ten days, Mischa will be here for most of it. She's being a total rock. Just the best. I love her. And of course it's not the same, but it is like a small piece of you, so it's something. More than that, because she is herself too of course. But, well. I hope you understand?

I'm not sure this is quite coherent? The meds' are something else. Did I mention them? As well as the sedatives? For the PTSD? Fred has given me the ones I had before but in a slightly higher dose. Just precautionary. They make me a bit fuzzy. But it tones it all down. So that's good. I think. Sorry. God Hannibal. I wish you were here so much. Sorry again. I know I'm not being fair. And it's not very helpful of me.<

There's a bit that Will has scratched out next and Hannibal can't read it, and oh how his heart hurts. The whole letter feels like it is Will trying so hard not to worry him. Trying to be reassuring and all the time he's feeling alone and slightly desperate. Well, perhaps not alone, but lonely. Hannibal considers the options. There is so little he can actually do, except offer reassurance, and love. Of course love.

He closes his eyes, and breathes for a few minutes, just steadying himself. He knows he's still furious with the man who took Will, and that if he'd felt a jealous protectiveness before it's increased by tenfold now. He opens his eyes again and reads the rest of the letter,

>I know you'll come back as soon as you can. We should stick to the plan. I know you'll come. It's all right. I know you will. And honestly? Screw the whole proposal business. We're getting married the week after you get back. Yes? As soon as you get a date from the general I'll set everything in motion. All right? Tell your parents, and your aunt and uncle? Yes? It's stupid to wait. You never get as much time as you think. Never. Don't let's wait Hannibal? Please? Will you? When you get back? Just marry me? And start wearing that ring, which I know is in your wallet. Please? Right now? All right? Please?

I love you. I'm all right. We are.

Will<

Hannibal reads the letter again. The urgency of the last part catches at him. It is always later than you think. Always. But not too late for them. He feels for his wallet in his hip pocket.

Inside is the ring Will picked out for him for the elopement that didn't happen. He pushes it onto his ring finger. And has to swallow round the lump of emotion in his throat almost choking him. Will. There is no question in his mind about it at all.

He's struck by a sudden idea and uses his cell phone to take a picture of his hand resting on Will's letter. He sends it straight away with no accompanying text. And then he reaches for the writing paper he keeps beside his camp bed and begins to compose a letter to his parents. He makes a mental note not to forget Murasaki and Robertus. With any luck they will make the trip to the US too.

For the first time since he took Will's letter from Tobias, really since the airport in Washington DC he feels suddenly illuminated, by hope, and love, and happiness.

.....

Several thousand miles away, but separated by only a heartbeat, the text arrives in Will's phone, wresting him from the doze he'd been skirting around for the last hour, tired after the long day yesterday of moving and unpacking and trying to reassure the dogs, and Abigail being upset, and Mason worrying.

He thumbs his phone unlocked and then sits up on the couch properly when he sees who it's from. He's surprised that it's just an image file. But then he opens it and it startles a laugh out of him. He carefully runs his fingers over the photograph, he'll have to save it to the screen, print it, frame it. Everything. He reaches for his own wallet, slips the one Hannibal chose onto his own finger. Looks at it. Then sobs a small sound of relief and love and yearning.

He texts his father and laughs at the one he gets back a few minutes later,

>you took your time. I love you both. And why are you still awake? Ton pere<

>why are you?<

>penny ante. Best not to ask.<

>g'night pere<

>g'night boy. Sleep.<

He laughs again and is about to go up to his room when he realises he hasn't texted Hannibal back. He takes his own picture and away it goes into the ether.

And for the first time since the kidnap he sleeps well unbeset by nightmares, but courted by dreams.

.....

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 87

Chapter Notes

> For Swingtime... a very naughty enabler, I mean encourager! Honestly. I was just on tumblr for five minutes...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mischa smiles as she pushes the empty cup aside.

“They simply decided to forge ahead, I think. Because of the kidnap. To not waste any more time.”

Bedelia smiles,

“Not exactly a proposal in the traditional sense then?”

Mischa laughs,

“Well, perhaps not, but that hardly matters. It was romantic enough for Hannibal, and is certainly reassuring for Will.”

“He feels it to be a talisman then?”

Mischa shrugs, just a small shift of one shoulder,

“I suppose so. It’s certainly a promise. Hannibal has also sent me an email. I shall call him later.”

Bedelia nods,

“You seem quite giddy yourself.”

Her lover smiles again,

“Of course! It’s what Hannibal has always wanted. He’s a traditionalist at heart. And a sentimentalist too I’d dare say. I couldn’t be happier for him. For the both of them. Truly.”

“And I am glad that you are glad. I suppose I can’t help but wonder a little at what Anthony will say.”

“You’ll tell him?”

“I think so. Otherwise he’ll just find out when Hannibal comes back to Washington. Easier to give him time to think about it.” She sees the expression on Mischa’s face. “No, I don’t think he holds a torch for Hannibal.”

“So he won’t mind? Well, maybe not mind, but I’m surprised that you think it would even register with him.”

Bedelia smiles faintly,

“No? Well, I know what you mean. But he liked Hannibal very much. And I think was sorry that they wanted such different things. Though I sometimes wonder that he mightn’t have tried to accommodate Hannibal just a little.”

Mischa opens her eyes a little wider in surprise.

“How extraordinary.”

Bedelia smiles, just possibly a hint of mischief in her eyes.

“Anthony says the sex was phenomenal.”

Mischa blinks,

“For gods sake! Don’t tell me that! And I sincerely hope you don’t say such things of me to him!”

Bedelia sobers instantly,

“No. Of course not. And I wouldn’t. But Anthony finds it therapeutic to let it all hang out, so to speak. Probably due to his repressed upbringing. It also gives him a measure of control and helps externalise it too.”

Mischa nods.

“All right. I can see that. And because Will is more at ease he has suggested we might have a few nights together. Just whilst he and Abigail settle back into the house. Would you like that?”

Bedelia slowly smiles,

“I should. Very much. At your hotel?”

Mischa nods,

“I kept the room.”

.....

Miss Bloom looks at Abigail. She will give her fifteen seconds to get on with her work and stop pestering the others at her table or there will be words.

She gets up from her desk, sometimes a circulating teacher can help to quell small rebellions such as this. No such luck. When she reaches Abigail’s table she is still distracting the others.

“Abigail? Let everyone at the table finish please. This is a quiet time.”

Abigail looks up at her and for the first time ever that she can remember Miss Bloom sees Abigail actually pout.

“But I’ve finished.”

“Well that’s good. But you should let the others do so too. Why don’t you draw something whilst you wait?”

Abigail makes a face.

“I can’t think of anything.”

Miss Bloom raises her eyebrows.

“What about something for the Colonel, won’t you send him a letter this week?”

And Abigail crosses her arms. A stubborn look flitters across her face.

“He’s going to be away for six months.”

Carefully Miss Bloom looks at her expression and her body language. If anything Abigail isn’t upset or worried she is cross. But that might just be her way of managing what must be an awfully complex range of emotions and experiences that she could be feeling right now.

“He is. That’s his work. I know you’re proud of him Abigail. We could all write to our soldiers this week. It would be a good thing to do.”

And Abigail shrugs. Miss Bloom just has time to think uh oh before Abigail puts in the most mulish of expressions and says.

“If you want. I don’t really care.”

Miss Bloom hunkers down beside Abigail’s chair,

“Abigail? What’s this about?”

Abigail maintains eye contact with her and looks rebellious. Alana Bloom feels the faint stirrings of panic. Every class has one or two ‘weather makers’, children whose behaviour and demeanour affect everyone around them. And in this class Abigail has always been a force for good. If this issue with the Colonel leaving has upset her? There’s no telling the mayhem this will wreak.

“Abigail? Do you want to talk about it.”

Abigail carries on looking at her stubbornly,

“No thank you. There isn’t any point.”

Miss Bloom blinks, oh shit.

“Abigail? When we finish for the day will you please stay behind just for a moment? I’m a little worried about you?”

Abigail blinks at her, and just for a moment her bottom lip trembles,

“Am I in trouble?”

“No, of course not, but I’m concerned.”

The lip stops trembling and Abigail looks defiant again.

“Do you want to talk to daddy too? I can ask him to come in. If you like?”

“Abigail? I think that’s enough. We’ll talk later on.”

Abigail shrugs and Alana’s heart sinks. She hasn’t handled this too well and this went bad fast. She will have to talk to Will and find out exactly what happened when the Colonel left. There’s definitely something there.

.....

Miriam walks swiftly across the base reading the print out of the email from Frankie. She’s sent pictures of the proposed bridesmaid and flower girl dresses which honestly? Make Miriam feel faintly sick. Too much flounce, too much purple, too much skirt. Damn, she should have gone with her uniform. She wonders what the Judge thinks about them, even if the number Frankie is suggesting for her is a little less, what, like something out of a Disney remake?

And she’s not supposed to breathe a word to Tobias, though he went with Frankie to choose dresses so what’s that about? She grumbles to herself, oh well, at least the little flower girl one is cute. And Abigail always looks sweet when her hair is all curled so the little tiny flower crown will look lovely as well. Miriam sighs, a fucking flower crown? Oh well, if she must.

She pulls her own serviceable cap down tighter over her head. God it’s cold. Why do people always think these bases out east are hot dry desert places? There’s bloody snow in the passes! She shivers, might be time to find something warmer, see if she can requisition some old parka? Though the local Suq has old Russian army ones from the last time round. They’re mighty warm!

.....

In the evening Will sits and draws a small credit card picture for Hannibal. But somehow his heart isn’t quite in it. He thinks it might be the medication or the come down after the weeks of heady pleasure, or what Miss Bloom said earlier on the phone when she arranged for him to come in and see her. What ever it is the picture looks wrong. He tears it up into tiny pieces. Maybe it would be better to burn it? Not one for Abigail to find even if it is in little bits, he wouldn’t put it past her to turn it into the world’s lewdest jigsaw puzzle.

He sighs, gets out another piece of paper and tries again, but abandons it after only managing the faces. Maybe tomorrow. Or the weekend? Maybe he should do some more unpacking?

He looks around the living room and tries to take stock. He feels? He feels a little numb truth be told. Relieved. But also numb. Maybe too much time to think about things? Maybe too much time talking about it? And just. Too much time. He fiddles with the ring. That at least feels solid. So does the thought of Hannibal. But he’s just so tired. And wired.

He knows that tomorrow he will have to go into see Jack and maybe Frederick, Jack needs a more thorough run down of the abduction and Will can’t help feeling that somewhere in there he’s going to be in some kind of trouble over it. He rubs his hands over his face. And realises that once again he’s not ok. Shit. Damn.

He leans back in his chair and takes some deep breaths. Ok. Not a panic attack. That’s good. But he should take some action. How late is it? Not too bad. Ok. Ok. He picks up his cell.

“Brian? You’re at home? Thank goodness, I could do with someone talking to me for a bit? You and Jimmy up for that? Sure... I’ll get the lap top and open Skype? Ok. Re-watch? Seriously? Ok, actually that sounds good, let me get some tea. Fantastic. And Brian? Thanks.”

He ends the call and shifts off the chair and into the kitchen and sets the kettle to boil, whilst that's happening he sets up his laptop on the breakfast bar, opens the Skype app and pings Brian, and then downloads the TV programme he and Jimmy are all set up to watch onto his Tablet.

Ten minutes later the three of them are doing a running commentary on some police procedural which none of them can work out is a spoof or not. They watch three episodes and by the end Will is feeling much better, and the three of them have decided it's definitely a spoof. For sure. Probably. Even if there wasn't a laugh track.

As he goes to bed he thinks about the ways in which he needs to get a better handle on everything if he isn't to go off the deep end.

.....

Hannibal laughs as Mischa explains about going back to the hotel. The news of Will is reassuring and he feels like he can breathe a little easier. They talk of a range of things and discuss how the different aspects of the wedding might be managed and not all fall on Will's shoulders even if he is the one who thinks that would be a good idea.

"I've written to our parents. And Murasaki and Robertus."

He hears Mischa laugh and can't help but wonder how far he can go in enquiring about Bedelia without Mischa closing up about it. She doesn't seem to be holding anything back but Hannibal worries.

He knows he's guessed something is up when he asks about the next few days. Mischa is a little cagey. He decides not to push but he wonders what the issue is, if there is one, or if he is letting distance and what happened before over sensitise him.

They end the call amicably. More than that, they end the call with much amused fondness. It's a shame she will still be in Europe when he moves back to the US even if it is probably better for their parents that one of them is at least on the same continent. He can't imagine persuading them to move even with the bright lure of a grand-daughter.

He sighs. But it's a happy one. Even more so when he sees that a text message has come in whilst he's been talking to Mischa,

>hey, preller say hi, and didn't you promise them an embroidered cover? IDK? Did you? Everything more or less ok here tho' Abigail has been acting out a little at school. I'm going in later this week. Miss Bloom said not to worry, just precautionary. Frankly that scared the beejesus out of me. But we'll see. Mischa is off with Bedelia? Just for a day or two, then she's coming back before she goes home. Can we lobby her to move? Surely the EU has some kind of US liaison thing she could get assigned to? What else. I miss you like fuck but that goes without saying. I hope all is ok at that end? I've got to see Jack tomorrow, maybe Fred too. Look at me, being all carful with my mental health and everything. Ok. Long text is long. I love you Hannibal. I miss you. We'll write this week. P.s. Coming up to new quote time!<

Hannibal smiles, though the matter of Abigail is of some concern. Perhaps he should write to her? Yes. Later, when he has a little more time. Just because everything is resolved between Will and he? Oh. He should ask, has Will told her about the wedding? What is, as they say, the party line. He should find out before he writes. Bother. He adds it to his already long mental list of things to do.

A knock on the door pulls him out of his reflections,

“Sir?”

“Sargeant?”

“I’ve got General Buddish on the line for you?”

“In the comms tent or can you patch him through?”

“Tent Sir.”

Hannibal stands,

“All right Tobias I’ll come now. Is it urgent.”

The Sargeant shrugs and Hannibal follows him out into the daylight.

Chapter End Notes

> The original post said this was chapter 97! I’m so sorry if this gave you a small heart attack. It’s only chapter 87! Still 13 to go! You haven’t missed the final crucial seven chapters before the denouement arc! And thank goodness Swingtime is paying attention and told me!

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 88

“What was the call about?”

Tobias makes a face as he hefts his breakfast tray. He and Miriam join the queue for the hot food.

“It was General Buddhish. Their other guy is ill, had some kind of heart thing.”

Miriam stares at him.

“A heart thing? What does that mean? Not General Davies?”

“God no. Sorry. I’ve still got sleep debt. Sorry. Fuck. Not our General. Err. Sorry about the language Private. No. Err General Marlow.”

Miriam slumps in relief, not their General.

“So, alright Sarge, why the Colonel then?”

Tobias sighs, fills up a large mug with coffee, glares at it for not being some nice artisan thing, god Frankie spoiled him, and then eyes the juice. Probably some concentrate gumph. Or rehydrate. Uggh. Oh yeah. Miriam is still looking at him expectantly.

“Because there will be a shuffle and it might mean the Colonel moves up or across, but at least back, much much faster.”

Miriam’s eyes go wide,

“But that’s amazing!” She pauses for a moment as they navigate across the canteen, grinning at a few people, nodding at others. She sets her tray down at an empty table and Sergeant Budge sits opposite her.

“Isn’t it Sarge? Isn’t it? What am I missing?”

Tobias shrugs,

“Well you know. And the Colonel looked mighty conflicted about it.”

“He doesn’t want to go back? That’s crazy. Of course he does. Doesn’t he?”

“ I don’t mean that.”

Miriam frowns at him,

“Sarge? What? You got a theory?”

Sergeant Budge blows out both his cheeks and takes a big gulp of coffee, yup, as shit as he’d anticipated. Still, it’s his own fault, he let Frankie spoil him. The coffee used to taste ok on base.

“Ok, what it is is this, General Marlow is Colonel Brown’s boss right? He might get shifted too, or I think it might mean our Colonel ends up working with him, or might be his ranking officer.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah. The fuck ‘oh’. You get it?”

They both look down at the trays and Miriam asks,

“You want these eggs?”

“Trade for the muffin?”

“Raise you the juice and a re-fill?

The Sergeant smiles.

“There’s nothing we can do is there?”

Miriam shakes her head,

“I don’t think so.”

They eat their breakfasts.

.....

Abigail stands beside the head teacher’s desk. Dr Sutcliffe is held in high regard by his colleagues, is liked by the parent body, and is adored by the children. Even the school board think he’s pretty great.

“So Abigail, I know your daddy came in. And I know your other daddy has had to go back to his base. That’s right isn’t it?”

Abigail nods. She doesn’t say anything and Alana Bloom resists either prompting her or putting a hand on her shoulder.

Dr Sutcliffe smiles at her,

“Abigail I know you love your daddies very much. Has something upset you?”

Abigail doesn’t say anything though a tear slides down her face. Dr Sutcliffe takes his nice patterned handkerchief from a jacket pocket and passes it to her. She starts to cry in earnest. Donald Sutcliffe sighs,

“Abigail, my dear child. You’re not in any trouble. You knew Colonel LEcter was going back to work didn’t you?”

She nods,

“So, my dear, did something else happen that has made you so miserable.”

He looks at Miss Bloom who makes a small face back at him, they had the whole story from Will Graham but it’s better not to make assumptions about what children think they do and don’t know. Better to hear it from them.

“Abigail?” he prompts gently.

“Someone tried to hurt daddy and Hannibal just left. He didn’t even care.”

Alana’s eyes widen and she ducks down so that she is at Abigail’s level,

“Abigail sweetie, your daddy said the Colonel didn’t know what had happened. He didn’t know he should stay, that your daddy might have been hurt.”

“But he didn’t wait.”

Alana looks at her earnestly,

“They’d agreed that if your daddy got held up in traffic or something then the Colonel had to catch his flight. He wasn’t being mean. He was just doing what they said. He said good bye to you didn’t he?”

She nods and though the tears are still there it’s not quite so bad,

“So he said good bye to you, waited until the last possible minute and then had to go. And your daddy did run all the way across the airport and they let him say good bye didn’t they.”

Abigail smiles very faintly,

“They let daddy on the plane. Roman said it was the most romantic thing he’d ever seen.”

Alana smiles at her again.

“I bet it was. And I know it wasn’t what you planned, and it wasn’t the nice send off with all of you there. But they did both get to say goodbye. You all did. I understand you and your aunt had a goodbye all your own.”

Abigail nods again, the hankie now clutched in her hands,

“Yes. And milkshake. It’s how I knew something was wrong. Everyone gave me milkshakes.”

“I understand. But they’re both ok. And the Colonel loves you both very much, you know that?”

She nods again and then whispers,

“I was scared. Hannibal went away and daddy wasn’t there.”

Dr Sutcliffe nods,

“You were very brave Abigail. I know your daddy is proud of how brave you were. But he did arrive, and he is ok.”

Abigail nods but still looks worried,

“Abigail?”

She shakes her head and looks a bit sad.

“I’m all right. I’m really sorry Miss Bloom. Please don’t tell daddy.”

Dr Sutcliffe looks at her,

“How would it be if we told Dr Katz, and she can tell daddy when it’s the right moment. She’s on your list isn’t she? Or should we email your other daddy?”

Abigail brightens. Maybe if Hannibal knew that she was upset and that daddy isn’t really ok then he’d find a way to come home?

“Are you going to tell him I was naughty?”

“Usually I say what the child has done and then discuss the circumstances. I can’t think of any other way to do it? What do you think?”

Abigail nods, it seems fair, and after all she was very naughty.

“Ok. And thank you very much Dr Sutcliffe. I promise to try my best.”

“Abigail, it is quite all right to be upset about things and you are allowed to tell Miss Bloom if you are not happy. Sometimes we can only work out something is wrong if you tell us. I know we seem like it but Miss Bloom and I aren’t mindreaders!”

Abigail looks amazed and then offers Dr Sutcliffe his handkerchief back.

“You should keep it.”

She smiles.

.....

Will wipes his eyes and then hugs Abigail a bit tighter. The email exchange with Hannibal has explained quite a few things, and helped them reach one particular decision,

“I’m sorry baby, I’m sorry. I’m ok. Really. And so is Hannibal. We all are. I promise.”

“Hannibal too? For sure?”

Will smiles a little weakly,

“Hannibal sure.”

She nods and buries her head in his shoulder, she peeks a little across at Frederick, he holds Tentacles out to her and she reaches for her friend.

“All right then both of you? I think we’re untangling this a little. I think we’re almost on the same page. That means we all know what we all know Abigail. Ok? All right little miss? All right Will? All right Mx Tentacles?”

Abigail giggles,

“Tentacles likes being a Mx. Hannibal said so.”

“And Hannibal is quite right. And you’re ok with being little miss? For now?”

“One day I’ll be a Countess. That’s not to do with numbers. It’s instead of Ms or Dr or Mx.”

Will cuddles her again, she has almost got her head round the idea though she doesn't like that it means that her grandfather and Hannibal would have to die first. If she's going to be why can't she just be? Will strokes her hair,

"You know you'll be Countess one day because Hannibal and I are going to get married?"

She sighs, yes, yes, one day, when Hannibal is back, she doesn't roll her eyes, but it's close, they've had this conversation before,

"Ok. So Hannibal and I decided that we'll get married as soon as he gets back. And that you're going to be the ring bearer and a flower girl to help Jimmy out because he's going to be flower boy. How does that sound?"

Abigail leans back a little so that she can see her daddy's face properly,

"Really? Really? When he comes back?"

Will holds up his hand with the ring on his wedding finger,

""I promise. See? He gave me a ring and I gave him one. But we didn't decide until after he went."

She blinks at him,

"So he does care? Properly?"

"Baby, of course he does. About both of us."

"But you're so upset still?"

Will sighs and cuddles her some more, he can feel the worry and the tingling anxiety like a coloured wave, really he should have spotted this, but the meds and the anxiety pulling at him, and the horrible leaps of fear? Damn.

"I know Abs. But not with Hannibal. And not with you, or any of our friends. Not at all."

She frowns a little,

"Not even though he went?"

"I'm sad. Of course I'm sad. We both are. And we've both been acting out a little bit, wouldn't you say? Because we're sad and worried?"

She nods and does a little shrug of agreement.

"But Hannibal had to go. And he will come back. We know that."

She makes a little face and Frederick holds out a hand for Tentacles.

"Let's get Mx Tentacles all sat down and comfortable then we can work this out a little more. Abigail, Will, you're both doing really well. Good job guys. Let's talk about the next few weeks."

.....

Hannibal reads the email from Will and takes a deep breath. They're working so hard. And he's not doing enough. He thinks about the conversation with General Buddhish. Maybe he could do more? Or at least, something. He opens the drawer of his desk and pulls out a note pad and begins to draft an email to General Davies.

.....

Will gets out of his car and locks the door behind him. He looks across the Quantico car park. It's his first day back since the abduction and he knows there will be people who want to check in with him, and maybe a few who will want to check up on him.

He mentally checks himself. Yeah. Ok. Abigail seems to have settled some. Mischa has been back for a few days and is having a leaving dinner night after next. He has managed to regulate his sleep pattern, more or less. He has talked to his dad a couple of times and had one lengthy and surprisingly good call with Hannibal's parents, all right, mainly Simonetta. And thank god they're excited and pleased, and she'd been incredibly kind especially when he had had a bit of a cry on the phone at her. And Hannibal has been just amazing. Emails, a few brief but sweet calls, and there's a letter burning a hole in his pocket right now. Which he mustn't lose because honestly the black mail material in it! Wow. Makes him blush. And he has managed to draw two new pictures. And Abigail has done a lovely card. And even Buster is behaving a little better now.

Will stops himself. It's ok. It's all ok. Sure, they've still got the I-70 killer to follow through on, but they're making progress. He takes a few more breaths. Thinks about the quote he's going to send with the next picture and letter package.

'The best love is the kind that awakens the soul; that makes us reach for more, that plants the fire in our hearts and brings peace to our minds.'

He thinks about Hannibal and Abigail and walks towards the front doors. He's got ten minutes before he's due to meet with Jack. Maybe just enough time to grab a tea. Something not too caffeinated. Maybe a muffin too. He hoists his bag on his shoulder. And even smiles.

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 89

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Garrett from Lab b hands Will a cup of tea.

“Ok with Jack then?”

“I suppose. Really what can he say? The guy is with Cordell at the BSHCI, they’re holding him. He asked to see me.”

Garrett sips his drink.

“Yeah? How do you feel about that?”

“Jack didn’t say I had to. Very carefully didn’t say it.”

“Doesn’t mean he thinks you should you know. He might have been leaned on too.”

Will sighs.

“That’s true. He might. Not by Fred. Just by his boss.”

They both have a moment of quiet reflection on the role of Kade Prurnell in their lives. Usually distant but like a promised storm on the weather forecast which you can never be sure about. Will it roll in? What damage will it leave in its wake? Just how bad will it be if you get caught in it?

“What do you want to do Will?”

Will slumps a little. Torn between what he really wants, which might, if he’s honest, still be a good cry, and what he thinks he ought to want. Which in this case might be the re-gathering of some of Randall Tier’s scattered parts.

Garrett quietly interjects,

“You don’t have to see him right Will. You’re not his enemy, or he yours. You don’t owe him.”

Will nods slowly.

“I feel like I am.”

“I know. Don’t we all? On a case? Personalise it? But perps? They’re not our victims. And he is a perp. Just because you know him, liked him, doesn’t mean... Well, if this was Bev, which it sounds like it could have been, what would we be saying to her?”

“Can I get you a double? Maybe with cake?”

Garrett nods.

“Damn straight. Treat yourself, why don’t you.”

Will takes a deep breath. Let's it out slow.

"I feel shaky."

Garrett nods and takes Will's cup from him, fills the kettle again and makes another tea for Will and coffee for himself. Gets down another cup from a cupboard when Brian comes in. Makes a second coffee. Brian doesn't say anything, just raises his eyebrows and then pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket and hands it to Will. The three of them keep quiet. Garrett makes the drinks, Will cries, Brian rests a hand on his shoulder.

It's enough.

.....

Roland Umber sits at the back of the class room and considers his class mates. The special snowflakes, the jocks, the popular girls, the class bitch, the joker, the geeks. Everyone with neat little identities, little boxes they like to fit into, the shapes and rules they police themselves and each other with, the social media they use to control each other. The little rebellions they try. The little bits of defiance.

He likes to watch. Like an anthill, or a bee colony, or a group of small scuttling things. Ethnobiology. The life and culture of things that herd. And the things that don't. Or those that live a liminal existence. He likes the word liminal. On the edge. Sharpness. At the point of things. And those that shift between the two. Deceivers. Camouflaged. Shapeshifting. Perfect. He twitches his nose. He's conscious he will have to join at least one society this semester. He must do the whole herd thing. For his resume and college applications. Got to look well rounded. Got to fit in before you can flit out.

Or seem to.

.....

On his cot in barracks Hannibal finally opens the package Abigail gave him at the airport. He's been saving it. Truth be told he feels a bit desperate and can't decide what's for the best. If he accepts the offer on the table it will mean he's working with Matthew and that won't be good for anyone. Especially not as his ranking officer. Line of command. All that. God. It makes him a little sick, and he's found it incredibly difficult to explain how uneasy it leaves him.

And oh, this unsettledness? God, the turmoil of love. And yes, he knows it is partly his own somewhat obsessive nature, but good god Will was kidnapped, and he wasn't there. And he isn't there now. And dammit, Will is clearly trying really hard. But, but. Will is clearly still not all right. Though, thank goodness, Abigail seems to have rallied somewhat, but when he examines his heart he feels worried for both of them. He focuses on the present, manages the outer layer of plastic, smiling at how tightly it's been wrapped. His darling girl.

When he finally wrestles the last layer off it's clearly a book she has made. He opens it, not quite sure what to expect, but it's a journal of a kind, of the two months they have had together. He turns each page. A napkin from that cafe. A ticket stub from the children's opera. A feather. And drawings. Of course. Lots of drawings. And photos printed out, sometimes with captions and sometimes not. God. It's a lovely thing and it pierces his heart with a sharp bright note, clear as a bell.

He shall have to suck it up, agree some terms with Matthew, find a way to make it work. He has to get back. And soon.

.....

Georgia Madchen makes a face when she gets a text asking her to come and see her manager. When she arrives she's slightly surprised to see Mr Wells and Roman waiting outside the office too.

"Oh. All three of us? What's happened?"

Roman shrugs,

"Who knows. Someone didn't like the inflight service? We ran out of duty free booze? The leg room was crap? Same old same old."

Mr Wells doesn't say anything, just smiles a bit,

"It would be worse if they'd asked only one of us, it's not a specific complaint at least. Come on. We can do this. Just like we always do. At least it's not some stag do to Vegas."

All three of them smile. Yeah. At least it's not that. The Vegas crews should get danger money!

Twenty minutes later when they come out they're all smiling. Mr Wells laughs.

"Come on, I'll buy the coffee. No drinking before a flight. But really? That was great."

The other two nod. Really? One of the most romantic things ever. Like off a film. Nice of Dr Graham to say thank you like that. Really nice.

Roman nods,

"I tell you what. They're always getting an upgrade."

"And their families."

"And their friends."

"And their dogs."

"And their postman."

They all laugh. It's the common refrain. Even the postman.

.....

Generals Davies and Buddish leave the meeting and one of them catches the eye of the other. They keep to the rule of saying nothing of consequence for ten minutes, until they are well clear of the conference room and the others who had been at the meeting they've just attended. In particular General Davies is keen to ensure that the retreating back of Colonel Brown has definitely completely receeded before he and Buddish have this conversation. In the end it is his colleague who starts off.

"Decent of him."

“Yes.”

“Recompense?”

“And personal rehabilitation. I think so. But he was sincere.”

“How would you feel?”

General Davies pauses, this is the trickiest bit,

“I’m not delighted at the prospect. But, I can also see that it’s the neatest solution. And it is generous of him.”

Buddish nods his agreement.

“I noticed no one hesitated about Hannibal’s suitability. You’ve done a lot of good there.”

“Mostly his own efforts. Wouldn’t you say?”

Buddish smiles,

“The best way to find out if you can trust a man is to trust them.”

Davies smiles,

“He hasn’t disappointed.”

They carry on walking for a few minutes, he smiles a bit more.

“Incredible opportunity with the poster campaign.”

Buddish eyes him.

“It is. I think, I can honestly say, this was some of the neatest bit of strategy and politics I’ve seen for a while. Nicely done.”

“Thank you.”

Buddish laughs,

“It’s one of the things I like about you. No false modesty. Did you know Thomas was ill?”

“No. Not specifically. But. Well. It was his ears.”

Buddish frowns, so General Davies continues,

“The Emperor Hadrian had these creases in his ears, it’s in all the portrait busts. I did some work on him, strategy in Britain, anyway, he died from congestive heart failure. Thomas has the same creases, it’s indicative.”

Elliott Buddish looks at his colleague, really, how extraordinary. And, well, he meant it, Davies will probably get a step up from all this. And he deserves it. Outstanding. And for Hannibal Lecter too.

“Will they let you tell him?”

Davies smiles.

“I hope so.”

“You think Brown will keep quiet?”

“I think he has learned some useful lessons out of all this. And who knows, in five years time, ten. One of us will have retired. He might make it back.”

Buddish nods, though he thinks what Matthew Brown has done is more likely to have been part of some personal penance rather than a professional piece of politicking.

.....

Abigail snuggles in against her daddy. Buster lies across her feet, he’s a bit of a lump but is better than a hotty bottle. Winston is curled against Will’s back. She thinks her daddy is still asleep, though really his alarm will go off soon. So it’s ok. And it’s nice to be back at home. Even nicer that Aunty Mischa is next door and they will have a special party for her this evening.

Abigail frowns. Aunty Mischa going is no fun at all. But only to Brussels, which is next to France, and she’s been to Paris and that was only a long sleep and cartoons away. So, not impossible, really. She sniffs a bit and then buries her face in the pillow. Daddy must have brought it from the rental because it still smells faintly of Hannibal. She misses him so much. It must hurt her daddy as well. He normally changes all the bedding once every two weeks at least and they have half a day when they pretend to be ghosts wrapped up in the sheets and quilt covers going wooooh! But this one doesn’t even match the others on the bed. She cuddles it to her.

She hugs Tentacles and a bientot kitty as well. They shouldn’t be left out. Tentacles’ wedding suit is carefully folded on a shelf in her bedroom. Lily and she made flower crowns from beads one evening earlier in the week and she’s being careful not to crush the one on Tentacles’ head. It’s a bit bony. Now that everyone is getting married it’s all a bit better, but not even weddings and parties and married can make everything right. Hannibal isn’t here. Her grandpa is still an ornery sumbitch though she shouldn’t say that out loud and he’s been married for ever. And some of her friends who are grown up aren’t married and they’re all right. So, it’s not always the answer. Not to every question. Though maybe it is the answer for her daddy and for Hannibal. If only he could come home.

She sits up a bit and Will stirs beside her so she makes shushing noises and strokes his hair. When she does it to Winston or Buster they go back to sleep and sometimes it works for her daddy too. Not this time.

“Daddy? Sorry. How many days is it until Hannibal comes home?”

Will smiles at her.

“We are going to get two jars. In one jar we will put a cent for each and every day until Hannibal is coming back. And each day we will move one cent to the other jar. When the second jar has all the cents we will buy Hannibal a really nice welcome home ice cream.”

“That’s not a very big present.”

“That’s because it will only be about a dollar and eighty nine cents.”

“But that’s not much at all.”

Will smiles,

“It really isn’t is it. It’ll be no time at all.”

She smiles when he tickles her. Really. No time at all!

.....

Private Lass smiles when she sees the Colonel walking briskly towards her with Sergeant Budge beside him. The grins on their faces are really something. It can’t be about her stripes because she’s already had the letter but they look mighty pleased about something. Something really good.

“Sir?”

“Come with us Miriam. I’m buying you and Tobias the best coffee on the base.”

She looks a question at the Sergeant but he just tries for an enigmatic smile. The good cheer though leaks around the creases next to his eyes. Something really good. But neither of them will say anything.

Finally, finally when they’re sitting down she leans forwards,

“Sir, you’re killing me. Please?”

“General Marlow is retiring. Ill Health poor man. I just spoke to General Davies. I’m being promoted. And going home. One month. Sargeant Budge is coming with me, I’ve been given the go ahead to ask you too. It’ll mean an office for three years? Think you can stand that?”

Later on she thinks that probably she shouldn’t have hugged and kissed them both, there, in the mess tent, in front of everyone. But honestly? A month. And really and truly Colonel Brown? After everything that’s happened? Amazingly decent of him. God. A month. And the look in Sargeant Budge’s eyes, and the light in the Colonel’s.

.....

“Hannibal? God. What time is it there? I’m at the lab. Are you ok?”

Will listens to whatever it is that Hannibal is saying to him. Bev and Jimmy exchange glances but keep going with the tabulation they’re working on. He looks dazed when he ends the call.

“Will? Sweety?”

“He’s been promoted. They’re moving him back.”

Jimmy does a great impression of a goldfish,

“How soon?”

Will blinks hard.

“Four weeks. Fuck. I have to find a wedding venue.”

He might shriek a bit when Bev hugs him hard and Jimmy laughs,

“I’ve still got dibs on flower boy! Right? Don’t forget.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to all the lovely people reminding me that damn I better get on with typing up!

Honestly, this week I’ve typed up 13,000 words from five stories. Only another 118,000 words of fic to transcribe..

Oh, and there’s a pic of Tentacles and the flower crown on Twitter and tumblr. I’m electrarhodes there too, do come say hi...

Adopt a Soldier AU - Part 90

“Darling, this is very nice. Now, to what do I owe the pleasure?”

Matthew Brown rolls his eyes, just a little, at his mother.

“Can’t I just want to treat you to a nice meal out?”

Iris Brown smiles at him blandly.

“You can, but I don’t think that’s it, is it? Come off it Matty. I know you, something on your mind. Oh. Not this business with Hannibal still. Darling, I thought we’d all got past that.”

Matthew interrupts,

“No, no. Mother, no. Well, only in a roundabout way. But mostly no.”

She frowns. And then they both have to wait as their server brings back their appetisers, fusses over the napkins, checks the water levels, and is generally excessively polite to them.

Once he’s gone, Iris makes a face at Matthew. He tries a bite of food and then drinks a mouthful of water.

“Thomas is retiring. It means they’re moving people round.”

For a moment Iris wonders if this means he’s going to be re-instated, but she catches the look in his eyes. Ahh. Not that then, so she just looks a question.

“The powers that be are going to promote Hannibal. He deserves it, and well, he’s been very decent really.”

Iris looks at him, her heart sinking,

“But he’d be your ranking officer, even with the move. That’s going to be terribly..”

He interrupts her again,

“I know. I’ve thought of that. So have the others. I’m going to move. Sideways. A lot.”

He lets that sink in a moment and she sighs,

“You’re going out again aren’t you? Hannibal’s posting? Is Davies taking you under his wing?”

“That’s about the long and short of it.”

She puts down her knife and fork.

“You’ve always been a hawk Matthew. Davies is more of a dove. How do you imagine that will play out?”

Matthew shrugs,

“Buddish has an opening in six months. I think I’ll have rehabilitated myself enough by then. It was mentioned. Originally they had it in mind for Hannibal. Secure promotion prospects. I’d be stupid to miss the opportunity.”

She catches what she thinks might be the faintest look of calculation on his face.

“That’s better. That makes more sense. Just a mid game move then?”

He smiles and eases back into his seat a little.

“Plenty of pieces still on the board mother.”
.....

Randall sighs and makes to scratch his face again. Jack can see where there is a raw patch up by the hairline. The shackles in the interview room stop his nervous reach but back in his own room? Maybe they glove him. Faintly Jack hopes it’s not a straitjacket, he hates the idea of that level of confinement. Gives him terrible claustrophobia even just thinking about it.

“Come on Mr Tier. You said you’d talk us through it.”

Randall looks back with a mix of nervous defiance, anxiety, and all round exhaustion.

“I said I’d talk to Will.”

Jack sighs, he’s tried the broken record thing with Randall but he’s just not getting it.

“Special Agent Graham isn’t available Randall. I’ve explained.”

In a moment of intermittent lucidity Randall glares at him,

“Yes, yes, you’ve explained, you’ve said, but I’ve explained, and I won’t speak to anyone but him.”

He leans back in his seat as far as the shackles will allow.

“Come off it Agent Crawford. I know how persuasive you can be. Just ask him. He’ll see me. Unfinished business isn’t it.”

Jack sighs. Horrible thing obsession. Terrible. All consuming. Makes you ravenous. And blinkered. And simply unable to truly see.

“I’ll ask him. One last time. Lay it all out.”

He frowns a little. He’s got no desire to lean on Will about this, but if Prurnell gets wind of the deal Tier wants to make. Info for access? Shit. He doesn’t know who he’d put his money on. Though. With the Colonel coming back, maybe this mightn’t be such a shit show after all?

He makes a face and turns to the guard at the door.

“Ok. I’m done. I’ll be back Mr Tier, one way or another. With an answer for you.”

Randall just snorts.

“I don’t need an answer, I just need Will Graham.”

.....

In his car Mason tries the radio and shifts the dial along waiting for something to catch his fancy. It's been a good evening, a memorable one. Nice of Will to include him too. And a great feeling, after all this time, being more on the inside. Being closer to Abigail, and Will. Being more of a family. An amazing feeling all told. And Mischa Lecter was sweet too. Really kind. Not patronising. Just kind, with a dose of good sense and some compassion in there as well. And now it looks like they'll all be real family. Tied together by paper, but also by love.

He finds a station he likes, the radio crackles. He listens, lets the words swell over him, filling him and his heart. He better get a suit of some kind. Something to fit with the other ushers. A wedding. A goddam wedding. And his dad? Well then, he'll just have to suck it up. Especially if the pastor is on board. Which she will be. Oh he thinks. Oh, maybe she'd make a cake too?

.....

Simonetta frowns across the table at their elderly maid.

"Did you hear that?"

The maid looks back quizzically.

"I don't think so. Maybe the Count? I'm not sure?"

Simonetta stands and makes her way out of the kitchen. Reminded as she does so that really they must do something about the carpeting. One of them will take a terrible tumble down the stairs unless they do. Perhaps they could get it all taken up? Have bare floorboards rather than this dilapidated Persian runner. Though the colours where it has not been worn through are still lovely.

She sighs. So many things fade into beauty, but out of utility. She can hear her husband now for sure, shouting from the dining room.

Inside he is leaned over the laptop. Smiling and smiling.

"My darling, come and read this. It is the very best news. The very best."

Simonetta comes to rest against her husband's arm and looks down over his shoulder and reads the screen. She scans it quickly and then laughs.

"Will you look for tickets? Have they found a venue? What's the colour scheme? Has Will emailed too?"

She hardly pauses between each question and the Count pulls her down into his lap. So light and frail really, like a bird. His precious sweet songstress. He doesn't like to think of her bones emptying, and her blood thinning, but surely it is so, they are both ageing. Thank god Hannibal will marry. That there will be someone to carry them forwards. Lecter is an old house, a noble one, it would be a sad loss. And now. With Abigail. Their darling girl. All will be made anew.

"Nothing from Will yet. Though Hannibal promises it soon. He is looking for a venue. They have given us a date range. So. Shall we? And fortunately I can manage the silver grey, so we shall surely find you something lovely to wear. Mischa will be best woman. For Hannibal. And he suggests we might do some thing at the reception. I'm not sure what. Some thing though, with

Murasaki and Robertus. He says they shall make it up as they like. Never mind tradition or convention. As their hearts lead."

Simonetta smiles and kisses her husband gently. So lovely to see him pleased like this. And probably relieved. It means everything will be secured. The house, well, the houses, the apartment, oh dear, the castle, and the titles of course. She can imagine that Murasaki will be looking sleek and delighted, to have been proved so right. Well, that is perfectly acceptable. Dear Will, she thinks, dear, sweet, loving Will, who has thawed her, yes, yes she knows it, can admit it too. He has thawed her. Made her kinder. Opened her heart, not only to him and to Abigail but to Hannibal and Mischa too.

"I cannot imagine anything better. Six weeks away. Oh well. Plenty of time."

"We managed in three."

She laughs,

"And it was all done by post!"

The Count smiles,

"I'd say they don't know how lucky they are, but I rather think they do. In the wider sense."

His wife smiles again.

"The one that matters."

He kisses her again and they sit, clinging to each other with gladness for so long that their elderly maid comes to find them bringing the afternoon tea she had thought to serve in the kitchen. She fetches another cup. She has known Hannibal and Mischa since before they were born. The Count smiles,

"Chiyoh my dear. Would you come as well? Hannibal would be very glad. And we will all stay in the house in Baltimore. We can manage the air fare I think."

The old woman smiles broadly.

"Actually, I might manage the fares for all of us. I have some put by, not for a rainy day, but for a happy one. Please let me. Save the money for new hats. You can buy me a coat. I'd rather have a coat."

The Count looks at her, the complicated ties that bind them all, going back more than half a century. Back to, well, better not to think of that now.

"Thank you Chiyoh. That would be an honour to us all."

She smiles.

"Thank you Sir."

Ahh, he thinks. A resolution. After all this time. And all shall be well, it's a quote isn't it? 'All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.'

It shall be. It is.

.....

Hannibal glances at his watch as he slides into the seat behind one of the laptops set up in the comms tent. He has a video call scheduled with Will in exactly five minutes. From his pocket he takes a list of things that really they need to talk about. He runs his eyes up and down it and lets himself get caught in the joys that are welling in him now that so much seems resolved.

He's almost caught with the surprise of the call connecting and then, there in front of him is Will, slightly blurred and pixelated but nevertheless utterly Will. Who looks both tired and serene, a new content. He can't help but smile back and then raise his hand to touch his fingertips to the screen where Will has rested his palm against his own lap top.

Hand to hand, heart in hand they don't talk for the first minute at least. There are enough things between them that don't need to be said. Or that can be said without words. Without even the need for words. Hannibal forgets all about his list. Will laughs eventually.

"I've found a place. Jack recommended it. Ok?"

Hannibal just nods. Will smiles a small lopsided smile,

"Do we care about a colour scheme? Your mother asked?"

"Shall we ask Abigail?"

Will nods and makes a note on a piece of paper in front of him. Ahh. So one of them at least shall be organised.

"Mason says his pastor will come and do a blessing. You want?"

Hannibal shrugs,

"There will be those attending for whom it will be meaningful, so maybe yes."

Will nods again and makes another note.

"All right then. Mischa and Bev as best women. Abigail and Jimmy for the flowers and rings. Brian is ushering. Who else?"

"I'd like to ask the General to read something. And Tobias and Miriam also as ushers."

"Ok. I've kind of asked Mason too. Pere says he'd like to do nothing but have a good time. What about your parents?"

"I suggested to my papa he might like to say something at the reception, perhaps with my mother. And aunt has some idea about the music."

Will laughs.

"I think that's it isn't it. I'll send you some menus. We've got the venue because they had a cancellation. Nothing sinister. Just a couple who changed their mind about which country to get married in. Maybe didn't fancy the Baltimore weather when they could have Barbados."

“It will be June.”

“It could be thunder and lightening and I wouldn’t care. Houses? Ok. Send me a list of definite yeses and no’s. I’ve a fair idea. But, we’ll, you know.”

Hannibal smiles again as Will makes some more notes. Gently he enquires,

“All right?”

Will looks up with some surprise.

“All right? Hannibal? I couldn’t be better. Thank you.”

Hannibal feels a wave of emotion sweep over him,

“Oh Will, it is I who should thank you.”

They revert to just looking at one another. And then Will smiles,

“You won’t even get an ice lolly.”

Hannibal is still puzzling over the comment several hours later. He must remember to ask. Why an ice lolly? What can that mean?

.....

Will puts another waffle on Abigail’s plate. Both Tentacles and A bientot Kitty are sat beside it. She tucks in happily.

“Abs? I thought we might visit your mom’s grave today. Take her some flowers. Let her know what we’re doing. Would you like that too?”

Abigail looks at her father, then back at her plate, and at her toys.

“Can we do her an invitation. So she knows we want her there too. At the wedding.”

Will smiles, a little sad, even if it’s a bittersweet sorrow.

“That’s a great idea. We could take her cake after as well. All right?”

Abigail nods.

“She’d like that. She would want us to be happy. Wouldn’t she. Not just little bits of happy. Proper Hannibal happy.”

“I hope so. I believe so.”

Abigail smiles and looks seriously at Tentacles, who can only look solemn in reply. All expression reflected in both their eyes.

“Me too.”

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 91

Mischa carefully opens the front door of her apartment and is still surprised when Cat makes a chirruping noise and runs to her and then rubs herself around Mischa's ankles. No doubt, later on, Cat will regret such overtures and behave with supreme indifference at Mischa's somewhat delayed return. But for now? Well she's more than glad.

A short ear scratch later and a Cat has decided that maybe such affection is enough and really there had better be food. Mischa, knowing full well who is in charge in the domestic sphere complies.

Cat fed and the kettle put on to boil she opens her bag and sets some things aside for laundry and dry cleaning. She debates the desirability of a shower or bath and eventually opts for neither. A quick wash, a change into some pyjamas and she's set. She eyes the tea she has made. Nope.

Her bed has never looked so welcome. As she closes her eyes she smiles. Business class had been a happy surprise, and how sweet those airline staff were, but even with an almost flat seat and blankets she is still shattered. Brussels is no inconsiderable distance from Washington. And with only the memories of Bedelia to heat her and Abigail and Will to comfort her, she could maybe sleep for a week. Maybe some delayed shock in there. Ah well. Change is still arriving.

.....

"Don't say a word. Honestly. It's the fifth time he's tried to eat them."

Jack smiles, he's seen Will with sticky tape on his specs before.

"Your Buster is a character. You going to get a new pair?"

"Oh. Well. I suppose. Damn. That's a pain. I've no idea where I put the prescription."

Bev makes a face at him,

"You better. It'll look rubbish in the photos."

Brian grins at him, remembering the conversation they'd had.

"Didn't you get a pair when we were out? Sorted out your headaches, well, they helped a bit didn't they?"

Will brightens, he did, they'll have a script. And the place was just down the road from where they had those really nice wedding rings. And yes sure they've already got rings but he could pretend they were engagement ones. They were really nice. Oh, maybe he could find something for Abigail, so theybcoukd have family rings, not just wedding ones. That would be very sweet. And fitting too.

"You're right. I did. That's great. And it'd be more up to date. I must have kept the guy's card."

He fishes in his pocket for his wallet and Jack carries on with the briefing. The I-70 killer has missed the latest cycle. Or the body hasn't been found, or he's on a whole different schedule to the one they've all believed him to be on. His ellipses or algorithm may, after all, be different to the

ones they've worked to up until now. Will pauses in his shuffling through the business cards stuffed into his wallet, really he should keep a Rolodex, it would be much simpler. But the cycle, well, it's something Will has given some thought to, off and on, so he interrupts.

"I did wonder if it's not a lunar cycle but a breeding and maturation cycle. You know. For the moths. And sometimes they don't hatch? Or pupate? So on that cycle we don't get a body?"

Everyone looks at him. How does he do that? Just suddenly read everything that's in front of all of them and come up with a totally new way of looking at it. Not just through the whole synaesthetic thing but just from seeing it all differently. It's not like the information isn't there, it's just, he understands it in a whole other way.

"Damn. Would that fit? Can we check back? That might? Shit. Why didn't we see that before?"

Will blinks through his stuck together glasses. But it's Jimmy who interjects,

"Well honestly, who the fuck could possibly chalk that one up as a motivating factor. For goodness sake. That's even barmier than usual. I'll get the other lab on it. That's exactly the kind of math shit that Garrett and Lydia like."

Jimmy does the whole bustling out thing and Jack eyes Will.

"Nice. Good job. Now. I gotta have a little chat with you about Tier ok? Brian, I don't need you for this bit, you neither Bev. Go on."

Bev looks reluctant but she doesn't say anything as she leaves the office, and Will faces Jack again, he has a bit of a bad feeling about this.

.....

Devon Silvestri nibbles on the edge of a thumbnail. He has strict instructions from Jack Crawford and from Jack's boss. He has a pretty clear idea that what the agency wants and what Freddie wants may be only tangentially compatible. And what Eldon wants? In terms of scientific accuracy? Something somewhere is going to get sacrificed. Again. He'd rather it wasn't him, or his job, if at all possible.

"Soooo." He starts. And straight away it's a bit of a tangle. And really Freddie's right. But so is Eldon. And Jack was too. And Fred. Ahh shit, he thinks. Maybe he should have gone for a less stressful job than press officer at the FBI? Like shark wrestling? Or running PR for the current political administration? Actually, he grins to himself, that would be worse. At least they're only trying to nudge a particularly nasty serial not manage a sociopath. That's quite good he thinks, is there any way he can use that?

.....

Reba walks up the central aisle of the church. She uses a cane here, the floor is a little uneven and though she knows the terrain as she does the landscape of her own heart she is somewhat mindful. The hand not occupied by her stick she runs along the back of each pew she passes. A brief anchoring touch.

Towards the front she stops and turns her head back a little.

“Hello? Are you minded to sit alone or can I join you?”

Molson looks up at her,

“I ain’t even going to ask how you do that. I’d be wasting my breath. How are you pastor?”

She makes her way along an aisle and stops at a chair just in front and to the side of where Molson Verger is seated.

“I’d say a little tired, all things considered. But not excessively so. You?”

“Not tired I guess. More. A kind of flatness.”

“Difficult when others have got gas.”

He makes a small huffing sound,

“I feel like I’m a real dampener on proceedings.”

They sit awhile. Molson not quite praying, more like considering, Reba sitting alongside him in that waiting. Because he is waiting. Even though he couldn’t say, if pressed, what for.

“I spoke to Will, they’ve asked if I’d pass on a blessing.”

Molson looks at her closely,

“Not give one?”

She laughs,

“It’s not me that does the blessing, I’m just providing the outward words, giving credence to the shape of it. Either they know they’re blessed or feel it, or they don’t. But I can help point them in the right direction. Be a reminder to everyone there. The blessing is there, waiting, if you feel for it.”

Molson rubs his hands over his face.

He’d like some kind of grace.

“I understand. I don’t have the poetics, but I get it. Well. Not get it exactly. I don’t. Not yet. But I can sense it.”

“Oh.” She smiles at him. “Are you sensitive that way? Can you tell when the weather will change? Or is it just hearts you’ve got the reckoning of?”

He laughs shortly.

“You’re good pastor. I’ll give you that. You’re mighty good. Though I expect you’d say that ain’t you neither.”

She smiles and leans a little towards him, laughs a little, conspiratorially.

“Now you’re really getting it.”

.....

Mischa and Hannibal's aunt and uncle shift through a pile of manuscript. Murasaki has some definite ideas about the reception music but if Robertus is to play something during the ceremony itself they can usefully collaborate. Nothing too sprightly, he is not as nimble as he once was and some of his fingers lack the required force for sustained notes or emphasis. But he is still a fine piano player, and he is very fond of his nephew.

He looks at his wife,

"I was just wondering about some film music. There's some very fine pieces over that last fifteen years or so."

He rifles through the sheets some more and then hands a score to his wife. Murasaki looks through it, a slow smile spreading over her face.

"Oh yes. I think so. I think that might be perfect."

They smirk at one another. Just a little.

.....

Mischa is woken by a text message,

>darling. we're having a hat and coat expedition. You must join us. Say you shall. Saturday week? Your papa has ideas! As does Chiyoh. Will has sent an email. Abigail has suggested pink and yellow, and green. And grey. With an emphasis on pink. Help. Love mama.<

She blinks at it a few times, groans slightly, just how pink and yellow is this going to be? Ok, maybe offset by some green and grey. She turns over and goes back to sleep. Good that her mother is so excited though. Really excellent. Though god alone knows what the photographs will look like.

.....

Garret knocks on Jack's door and waits a moment for the all clear. When he pokes his head inside Jack is looking even more tired than usual.

"Garret. Ok? Tell me we got something off this?"

"Sure. You all right Jack? You look a bit distracted. This about Bella?"

Jack shrugs. He makes no secret of his wife's condition, neither of them do, doesn't make it easier to deal with though. No amount of sympathy can meet the ever draining presence in their lives of chronic illness.

"Rough patch with the chemo. The insurance guy keeps on at us about some trial."

He pauses and Garret frowns a bit,

"Yeah? Well there's a reason they're called trials isn't there?"

Jack snorts a bit. Slaps his hand on the desk. Sits up a little straighter.

“Like trains and aeroplanes having terminals? Yeah. You’re right. So? Anything?”

“Will hit the nail on the head. I talked to his guy at the Smithsonian as well. Tied into the moth’s cycle. Hell of a thing Jack. And no sign of stopping. You hoping he’s settled for this? Not escalating?”

“If he drops one each time it’s bad enough. I’m dreading more.”

“What’s the thinking on his breeding programme. Eldon says you’ve been thinking he might have a supplier? The other guy?”

“Or he’s supplying the other guy, the one who’s done the traceable emails, it might be that way round.”

Garret sighs. Yeah, of course. The emailer might be somewhat innocent in the grander terrible scheme of things, just piggybacking on the other crimes. For some kind of attention. Jack looks down into his empty coffee cup, as if hoping to be able to read the grounds there.

“Ok. So did you or Lydia work out the timeline?”

“We know the gestation and pupation cycles. If we go from the last body we’re looking at a window in about three to six weeks. I’m sorry it’s not more definite. It depends if they’re at different stages. But the curve is steady so we’re optimistic.”

“And what’s your thinking about the historic gaps in the timeline?”

Garret makes a small shift in his chair. They’ve thrown this question around in their own lab as well as talking it over in the A team.

“We’ve surmised that either the need got greater and he simply escalated. Or he got more fixated on the process, or he somehow possibly got better access to a victim pool. Or a combination. But I checked back, Margot fits the schedule. But the true escalation didn’t happen for 18 months after her death. Though there are some possibles in between as well as a couple of definite maybes.”

He doesn’t quite shrug, but it’s close. Unless and until they get the guy they will struggle to be exactly clear about the whats and the wherefores. And even if they do get him, it isn’t a guarantee that he’ll be in any way forthcoming, especially about any kills they can’t tie to him exactly. Federal case? Could be looking at the death penalty. Even though any competent lawyer would probably argue for an insanity plea. The moths would be a shoe in. Though a good prosecutor would argue calculated premeditation, or could, which could obviate insanity. Depending. It all come down to the arguing. In the end.

“Three to six weeks then?”

“Until the next. Yes. Three to six.”

.....

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 92

Hannibal reads Will's letter again and then carefully puts the tiny cards into the silver case Will gave him. He thinks about the beautiful line by Neruda.

'Only a burning patience will lead to the attainment of a splendid happiness.'

And oh how it speaks to him in this moment. He sets the little engraved case on his locker and lies back, both hands behind his head, his fingers idly turning the ring Will gave him around and around. He wouldn't have said he was a fiddler but he's conscious now of all the ways in which his hands feel a soft absence. Especially here in bed. The little drawing has only served to remind him.

But there're only 24 days to go. Though a stupid number of things must be accomplished in that time. Miriam has even drafted a list of lists at which he would have smiled had she not been so serious about it all.

And though he feels not an iota of superstition he cannot help but be amazed at how things have fallen out. The gods laugh at plans. It may be so, in which case just for once he shares their sense of humour. Six months? Even 24 days seems too long. He sighs a little, just a touch of melancholy, a wistfulness. Now that they're all ready he can hardly wait for life to begin.

.....

Abigail feels that really she has been very very generous. She hasn't said 'I told you so' or 'you're just stupid' or 'you don't know anything really' so actually she feels just a little bit proud of herself. And if she has just the faintest trace of superiority on her face right now? Well so there! Her daddy and Hannibal are getting married, and she was right, and everyone else was wrong. And she got to choose the colour scheme, and the flowers, and she's going to have a family ring. So the others can just suck it up.

Yes. That's what Bev says or Molly, or Jimmy, when someone else has been wrong. So she's got a plan. Next time Katie, or Denise, or Clark say anything silly, that's what she's going to say 'you can suck it up.' She smirks to herself. It's not proper swearing so she can't really get in trouble. She looks down at her story and writes the next few words.

Honestly, she almost hopes someone is a bit rude. 'Suck it up.' She mouths the words to herself.

"Abigail?"

Ooops. How does Miss Bloom do that? Maybe she can read lips as well as minds?

.....

Will and Frederick look at each other. Will stops slouching against the wall where they've been waiting.

"Ready?"

Fred grimaces.

“You still don’t have to do this Will.”

He shrugs.

“If he shows any sign of baulking, or extending this is any way, I’m out of there, I’d guess we both are. But Prurnell was right really. He has got some kind of insight here and it’d be good if we can get it out of him.”

“Did you talk it over with Hannibal?”

Will stands a little straighter.

“Oh yeah. By email. Let’s just say he has views. Though I’ve got to admit I managed a neat and unexpected bit of distraction mentioning Cordell.”

Fred looks at him in surprise.

“Cordell? Really? Oh, wait. He knows Cordell? Damn!”

They both laugh and Fred smiles,

“We said at your housewarming we’d eventually work out who we’d got in common from our training days. Cordell? Well there’s a thing. We’ll have to tell him later.”

The guard who escorts visitors arrives on the other side of the barred door and unlocks it.

“Dr Chilton? Dr Graham? You both know the drill? The good news is Dr Tier is in a cooperative mood. The bad news is he’s a little more fixated on Dr Graham’s regard than before. As you might expect that could go either way.”

He finishes unlocking the door and ushers them through. Fred glances at Will who has a determined look about him.

.....

Frankie stands looking at swatches. Really she could wait for Tobias to come back home, but, well, she kinda would quite like to have it all sewn up by the time he’s back. Sewn up? She smirks to herself. Yeah. Uh huh.

She shifts a little, a small burp escapes her and she checks around to make sure no one heard. She rubs at her sternum, she’s had terrible indigestion for the last few days. God she’s practically mainlining those little peppermint tabs. She smirks a little again, it’s all Tobias’s fault. I mean. To go from six months maybe to by the way 28days. 23 now isn’t it? And sure they won’t have to get married straight off but better to have as much sorted as possible isn’t it? And god she always gets gastro trouble when she’s anxious!

She takes some pictures of the different fabrics and then smiles brightly when a shop assistant returns carrying several more. Honestly some of the colours would look lovely on Abigail but make her sister look like an airship. She smirks again. Lynnie can just lump it.

.....

Roland Umber endeavours to be polite to the receptionist. The book he's reading about social interaction seems to mostly work, though some adults look at him as though they think he might be taking the piss somehow. Never the less he's been persevering with it, and had a conversation with the school guidance counsellor about it. He'd been surprised when they'd actually offered some interesting insight too.

He explains about the glasses and she takes them from him, adjusting her own as she peers at the tiny screw that's working its way loose. She frowns. He tries not to fiddle with the name thingy she has in front of her on the desk. Ms Speck. Better there than one of those badges which mean you have to look at someone's boobs and then they get all offended. She holds the frames up to the light to see a little better.

"I should give you one of our tiny screwdrivers. The blade of a knife is probably too thick. Did you have a go yourself?"

Roland tries a sort of smiley shrug, and wonder of wonders it works. She flashes an indulgent smile at him.

"I'll just ask if we've got any samples. We get given pens galore but some guy brought round some with their name on, kind of a promo? You know?"

Roland nods again and the receptionist disappears into the area behind the front office. He glances around, only one person waiting right now. He hears voices and both the receptionist and one of the optometrists come back into the room.

"Roland? Hey. How are you son? Everything all right with you? How's school? Ok? What is it you keep? Moths? How's the colony?"

Roland smiles back, this isn't the guy he usually sees, but he's ok, avuncular, if that's the right word. And always asks about his hobbies, about school, encouraged him over that summer internship. His mom had been a bit odd about it, but the guy is kind of distantly friendly not that kind of chummy that gives you a weird vibe. So she eased off, eventually.

"Good sir, I'm just starting to look at colleges. Hoping to major in entomology."

The guy smiles and nods and then laughs as he remembers to hand over the pack of tiny screwdrivers.

"Neat isn't it. And here's my next too, right on time. Ms LeBeau isn't it? Come right on in."

He sketches a wave at Roland and Roland remembers to thank the receptionist. Maybe Mr Leeds could be some kind of referee? On his applications? Yeah. Maybe.

.....

Bella takes a long slow breath and holds it. She manages not to smile around the lungful. God. Medical marijuana is the best even if she and Jack don't quite see eye to eye about it. Especially when it involves one of his colleagues. She smiles at Jimmy. Lets out a dreamy exhale.

"You didn't have to come out just because Jack has his head up his arse about the moth guy."

Jimmy smiles and holds out his hand for the joint.

“I didn’t. It’s true. But who else do I know with such excellent weed?”

He takes a long toke himself.

“I keep telling myself I can give this up any time.”

She laughs and takes it back.

“You’ll have to. Eventually. Unless you’ve got a whole ward full of cancer patients lining up to share their stash with you?”

“Nope. Just you babe. So you’ll just have to stick around as long as possible.”

“At least to your wedding Jim.”

“Brian will kill you otherwise. You know that don’t you. Mrs matron of honour.”

She smiles,

“Jim. Realistically. Just for a moment. If you’re thinking the autumn, well, I might not quite..”

She trails off. Both of them looking at the thing in cold relief that they’d rather not ever have to think of.

“For real?”

She nods.

“Yeah. Sorry.”

He shakes his head a little. He takes another drag.

“Man. You are really harshing my buzz right now.”

They both laugh.

.....

Judge Davies shuts the outer office door and then indulges a small guilty pleasure. Oh yes. Naughty Ms Lounds. She reads the article a few times. Ahh, nothing actually new, though Freddie has managed a clever spin on it. And so many kills now. Thirteen? Fourteen? She can’t help wondering if he’ll suddenly stop, or change his pattern. He did seem to escalate for a bit but if the calendar Freddie has helpfully included is anything to go by then he’s eased off slightly. Or missed a window. Or they’ve been calculating wrongly

Of course. It is entirely possible that Freddie herself has got it wrong or has been fed some false intelligence. Just to mislead the perp. It wouldn’t be the first or last time the press has helped push someone out into the open either willingly or unwittingly.

Really, it’s only curiosity on her part but she does wonder. And there is of course still just a faint chance that if they catch the guy he’ll end up before her. She sighs. It’s a hell of a big case. At least 14 deaths, maybe more. And really she’d like to see the thread that links them all. Will’s wife included. Even if she did sound like a troubled soul all told, she deserves some justice. Even if it

won't feel like it to those left behind. Even if it never really can. Resolution maybe, but justice? That's more elusive. In her experience at least.

She closes down Freddie's site and settles in instead to some film reviews. Maybe she and the General could go and see something at the weekend? She looks through the current releases. Superhero. A strange re-visiting of WW2. Some Oscar bait. Some other Oscar bait. Another superhero. An antihero. Hmm. Maybe the war film. At least he'd appreciate the opportunity to laugh at Roosevelt. And the battle cgi will probably be spectacular.

.....

Winston rests her head on Will's knee. He trails a hand through her hair, round her ears, a little under her chin. She makes a contented noise and blinks up at him before closing her eyes again. Buster is in the dog house. In as much as she can she wonders about why he likes to rile things up. Perhaps that is just the way of some dogs? She however likes a peaceable life, where a lamb could lie down with a wolf and not be devoured.

Big is more peaceable now, even though the other big has gone away. It was second big's slipper that Buster was carrying around. Not chewing. At least she doesn't reckon so, just carrying it carefully, she thought, maybe wondering where he is. This big doesn't seem too worried so probably the other big is coming back. Little big is asleep and proper big is just doing something with the flappy things that must never be chewed. The things that taste of outdoors and have a memory of the trees they used to be. And fish. Holding the old ones together.

She sighs. A happy sigh. Full of dark now and sleep, and sunshine warm from the loud thing that spits if you're too close and makes you smell like something bad when your fur crinkles. Though the furryness in front of it is good to sleep on. When Buster doesn't get there first. Proper big is scratching that nice place. She gives his hand a little lick, just so he knows he is doing things right. Good big.

.....

Out on a bit of scrub on the border of two counties in Ohio, just down from a railroad track, a hobo investigates what he hopes will be good pickings all rolled up in a carpet, tied round with some rope.

It isn't good pickings, no, not at all, though he gets a warm bed for the night and a hot meal and a new scarf out of it. Victim 14. The sheriff hardly has to even look when the trooper calls it in. Yup. It's their guy. He's almost sure. And it's been here for a while. A good long while if the overgrowth is anything to go by. He looks around. Really, it would have been almost impossible for a casual observer to spot it. It just took some guy looking for some warmth, looking for something to hock. Actually looking, rather than just passing by.

Damn it all to hell and back. Victim 14. And that makes three in this county. More or less. But as he makes the call he does wonder about the carpet. Maybe, just maybe they'll catch a break?

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 93

Jack and Fred mostly try not to look at each other, both of them bothered by the fevered brightness in Will's eyes. The session with Randall was certainly productive but it's also had a cost; namely Will's peace of mind. But he is trying hard to reassure them,

"I know I seem worse. I know. But, there's an upside to this, truly, I promise you. It's what I said to Hannibal. Thinking of Randall like this, even knowing what little we know, I knew I'd be able to see if he was dissembling, if really he was more involved than he's been letting on. But he's not, don't you see, that's a good thing? It means someone I knew, ok, not very well, but someone I knew wasn't involved in Margot's death, isn't involved. And that's fantastic. It was one of my biggest fears. That I'd been blind to it, all this time. That I didn't see what was in front of me. Who was in front of me." He pauses a moment. "I'm talking too much. I'll stop. But I promise. Overall? It's better this way." He catches Jack's eye. "Ok really stopping now."

Fred doesn't reach out a hand to touch him, he knows how that could go when Will is in this kind of shape but he leans in a little.

"I can see that Will. I get it. But you're shaken? A little?"

"Stirred. Not shaken."

Fred nods. It's sort of code between them, a scale that describes just how upset Will is by something. So he looks to Jack instead.

"And is what Randall said actionable Jack? Do you remember the kid, Will?"

Will shrugs.

"I know he stood out to Randall, but he spent more time with them. They all seemed pretty keen. I'm not really sure I'd remember anyway. I was a mess back then."

Jack sighs a little.

"It's not really more actionable than the last time he ran this flag up the pole, when he talked to Bev. All we've got is the kid likes moths and other damn fluttery things. And he lives not far from where those emails were sent to Freddie Lounds."

"Both sets of emails?"

Jack looks at Will and replies slowly,

"Yeah? You were out for that bit? Right? Both lots. The ones from the library and the stupidly untraceable ones. Just pinged some central mast or some thing, I dunno, however these things work. Hold on."

He grabs for his landline, catching it before it's begun the second ring, and sits back a little in his chair. He leans forward again almost immediately and begins taking notes on his desk jotter. As he does so he looks between Fred and Will. They look at each other. When Jack puts the phone down Fred half reaches forwards,

“Don’t tell me Jack. Another?”

“Another. Same county. That was that poor sherif again. But it’s historic. Not in the current cycle.”

Fred eases somewhat,

“Is that a good thing? It’s a good thing. Isn’t it? He’s still holding pattern? As long as..”

He trails off and Will finishes the thought.

“As long as we haven’t missed it. I want to see the pictures Jack. Are his drops getting easier to find? Some of the older ones were pretty well hidden. He could be pushing towards something?”

Jack rolls his eyes.

“Oh that’s just peachy. I’ll get you the pictures Will. But you’re not going up there. Ok?”

“Wouldn’t even occur to me Jack. One moth obsession a week is my lot. I promise you.”

.....

Bev slams the back door on the SUV. She smiles faintly at the trooper who holds out a gloved hand to take the large evidence case from her. It’s damn heavy, and she’s fighting no battles out here so she hands it over. He answers quietly.

“Thank you ma’am.”

She looks at him in some surprise. His eyes are red, like maybe he’s been crying. Though it could be the wind, blowing up the dust, irritating his eyes some.

“You ok Officer?”

He sighs.

“I don’t know the victim. At least I don’t think so. State she’s in though, I guess it’s hard to say, you know? But I’ll know someone who knows her. Probably, though this here is a hang out for hobos, guy who found her? Does the rounds, you know it?”

Bev nods, people, whether they are leather or rubber tramps, hobos and their like usually have some kind of rounds. Usually seasonal, tied in to casual labour, and food programmes, and available shelter. Or meds. Or just kindness. Or something, some sort of pattern in their head that guides their feet.

“Yeah.” He sighs. “So, I guess might be a seasonal, just tripping through, chances are though that she’s a local.” He muses a little. “Though this close to state lines might confuse the issue.”

Bev nods. It’s what they’ve surmised, multiple, ambiguous or confused county and state boundaries? Makes jurisdiction and follow through a right royal pain in the proverbial, even if everyone knows they’ve got jurisdiction still makes records hard to track and dots hard to join up.

“I’m sorry for the loss. I get it. It’s shit. This guy. Honestly. When we get him, damn we’ll come down so hard.”

The trooper sighs a big sigh.

“You think you’re anyway close?”

She shrugs a little.

“All the time. Closing in. All the time. Don’t doubt it. We’ll get him.”

The trooper puts the case down next to the others, closer to the retrieval site as Jimmy joins them. Bev thanks him and the guy sketches a wave before heading back towards the road.

“Give me a shout if you need me to carry it back later. I’ll still be here. Reckon I’ll be on traffic.”

Bev nods her thanks, already a little distracted by Jimmy urging her to come and look at the carpet around the body.

.....

Miriam scans the headlines. She knows within a paragraph of text that the Colonel is going to be furious. That reporter. That reporter whom everyone said would keep to her side of the bargain has clearly got some info from someone. And has run with it. Damn. There’s way too much about Will in here, and his wider involvement in the case.

She reads down the whole thing. Ok. Better to give the Colonel a heads up. Maybe the General will call him? He will certainly want to call Will and check in. Shit shit shit. Why did this have to happen. Shit. She reads it again, slightly slower this time. Ok. So maybe people wouldn’t guess if they didn’t know. But. But she does and so, shit. It also, kind of, ties Will’s wife, well, late wife, It more or less ties her murder into the I-70 killer. Ok. If you didn’t know maybe you wouldn’t guess but there’s enough there for anyone to pull all the threads together. Probably. Possibly. You’d just have to look up a few names. Make an educated guess. From the inference.

“Sarge? I think you had better look at this. You’re not going to be too happy about it. We gotta find a way to tell the Colonel.”

Sergeant Budge looks at her. He doesn’t like her tone. That’s not going to be good whatever it is. Really. It’s just three weeks. Less. Isn’t there any way for this to not all go pear shaped either here or back home before they get back. Frankie’s already going to see her physician with this damn gastro oesophageal reflux. Man she gets bitchy when she’s got the burps! And if this is about Will, or Abigail, this won’t help. They’re all tied together now aren’t they? Family. One of the millennial kinds when it ain’t all about kith and kin but connection.

“Miriam? What is it?”

She turns the laptop round and he reads the article.

“At least there’re no pictures.”

She nods slowly,

“Click the links Sarge.”

He does as she asks and then just puts his head in his hands. For fucks sake.

.....

Bev hoists the last case out of the SUV and onto the trolley.

“Damn, I wish we still had that guy around to help.”

“Who was he?”

“Local trooper. From the sherif’s department.”

“You get his name?”

“No Brian I did not get his name or his number, what you saying man, what is this? I’m almost a happily married woman.”

“Don’t get tetchy Bev. I’m only asking because Jack texted me. Freddie has finally done the dirty. There’s an article on Tattle Crime. I’m wondering where she got her info. How indiscreet were we when he was in ear shot..?”

She makes a face, nice of Brian not to lay the blame all at her feet, and there’s zero chance Freddie will give up her source.

“Fuck. I’ll give the sherif a call, let him know there’s a rat. Come on.”

She gestures to the elevator and they head towards it while she searches through the contact list on her phone.

In the lift she fiddles around a bit more, reception is rubbish in the basement, and she trails behind Jim and Brian as they make their way to the lab. When they get there Jimmy and Brian get on with the painstaking process of logging everything in. Cassie takes a drinks order. Everyone looks knackered.

“Bev? Hey? I’m getting hot drinks in, you want anything?”

“What? Oh. Thanks Cassie, but I’m ok. You better hang on a moment. Guys? Listen. I spoke to the sherif. They had no troopers on traffic duty. And no one got assigned to us.”

Jimmy and Brian just look at her, a little open mouthed in shock.

“But we all spoke to him. Damn he carried the bags and everything. You got a look at his badge didn’t you.”

She sighs. A lot.

“Kind of. Yeah. Sort of.”

Brian holds up a hand.

“Ok. So he handled the cases. They were all locked. That’s good. Tell me he didn’t handle the carpet. Did he?”

They look at each other. Damn. Did he? Jimmy slows them all down.

“All right. I’m worried about the evidence. Chain of custody shit and everything. But. More importantly who the fuck was he? Damn. We’ll have to try for a composite. See if anyone else

interacted with him. Oh fuck. Damn. Jack is going to be so pissed."

They look at each other in dismay. Jack is, indeed, going to be so pissed.

.....

Beau listens intently to his end of the call, he glances up at the folks he's got a penny ante poker game going on with at the VA Centre.

"Guys? Add it all up. I gotta go."

He gets up from the table amidst some cheerful grumbling and carries on with the call. His friends watch him curiously, only catching snatches of the conversation.

"Come up here.... Yeah.... Right..... Take Abs out of school.... Yeah.... Sure. What did Mason say? Ok..... Or Molson. Good. Yeah. Good. No. Ok..... I see that. Fair enough..... when you up until?"

He hangs up and makes another call immediately. He walks further away from his friends so they don't get the gist but he comes back and collects his small pile of coins.

"Don't even ask. Thing with Will and Abigail, gotta go guys. Don't hold your breath or nothing."

He collects his jacket on the way out. Maybe they'll put a guard on Will and Abigail, and maybe they won't but he won't leave them lonely, or leave Will wondering about every damn sound in the night. Damn. That stupid woman. Fucking them over like this. And Molson? Shit. Of course he's upset. Of course he is. Damn. Ok. One thing at a time. He fumbles with his chip in his pocket. Damn. Maybe he should call Molson before he sets off?

.....

Up east, a little distance from where the most recent body was found a guy puts his garbage out for the night. He's a bit pissed about it when he finds someone has already filled his can with some big compacter bag, knotted at the top. He pokes at it a little. Soft. Like textiles or rags or something. He leans over the can and then tips it on its side. There's a pair of shoes loose in the bottom. What is this? He uses one of his keys on a pocket chain to open up the trash bag. Weird. Some kind of uniform. He gets it out properly and realises it's one of those dark blue Sherif department issue pants and a shirt, and a kind of blouson jacket. Badge and everything. Not this county, the next one over. Maybe he better give them a call. He brightens up a little, there could even be a reward? Couldn't there?

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 94

“You’re too close to it. Honestly, come on guys, why would I jeopardise my in on this with some, what did you call it Dr Zeller? ‘Wild and crazy ass speculation, innuendo and foolery’, and btw good word use. Tight.”

She smirks a little, but Jack still frowns.

“You connected the dots Freddie.”

She eyes him.

“Not as far as I know. How? What? Who?”

Bev snarls at her.

“Why not go the full Kipling Freddie. You know.”

Freddie looks around them all. Nope, still not getting it. All she did was rehash the stuff she’s got. Add in a moth picture. Mention the stalker guy and the aborted abduction. Name a few of the putative victims. All of whom are in the public domain. So. What is this? Was it the link to the earlier articles.

“Ok. So I hit something didn’t I? What? Some connection you’re trying to keep on the down low? Because of how it impacts the case? Damn. You should have given me a heads up Jack. Hard to avoid something you don’t know you’re meant to avoid. What? Or, ok, who is it? Who’d I throw under a bus?”

She glances round them. All of them have got a mention at some point or another. Though admittedly there was a small bit about Will Graham this time which was new. She blinks at them. Something to do with him then, which is why they’ve gone all Trump on her. Oh. Wait. Shit.

“One of the victims. Connects to Will Graham, doesn’t it. Damn. How’d you keep the lid on that?”

They all stare at her until Jack says,

“Damn it all to hell and back. And we just confirmed it.”

She nods slowly.

“Well yeah, but I did mean what I said when I agreed to keep him out of it. Him and the kid. Like I said why would I?”

She makes a face at Bev who makes one back. Alongside the snarl.

“Yeah ok. Ad revenue. I know what you think of me. But this time? Pure investigative guess work. Come on guys.”

Jack sighs. He already knows their lawyers say there’s nothing, and at least one of them made the rather bemused point that they couldn’t see what the issue was.

“Let me remind you Freddie, it’s not a smooth move to piss off people who know how to keep the bodies buried.”

She rolls her eyes.

“Yeah, all right. Keep your hair on Jack. How about I don’t print a retraction, it’ll just draw attention to it. Right?”

With some regret they all nod agreement. None of them are particularly delighted by this turn of events. When she’s gone Jimmy asks,

“Are we overreacting? Is it not obvious if you don’t know? What did the lawyers say?”

Jack sighs. Hard to be objective when it’s one of your own.

.....

Will hugs Abigail. She’s not 100% sure what the deal is but she’s staying home from school today. Her grandpere was in the kitchen making pancakes when she woke up. And they seem to be going on a little mid-week adventure somewhere, involving fishing poles, tents, and both Buster and Winston. And no one even mentioned it before. And it’s not her birthday, or her daddy’s or her grandpere’s or even the dogs. Soooo. A little bit surprising. And apparently Miss Bloom has said it is ok. So, that’s very unexpected, though she does expect there will be homework or something!

Packing for a trip outdoors is not like the other kinds of packing and she has a definite list of things she must take if she is going to enjoy it. A hoodie to sleep in otherwise the wind goes right down her neck and that’s just horrid. And a nice pillow, because most nights can be slept through if the pillow is all right. And Tentacles. A bientot kitty wouldn’t enjoy it at all, but Tentacles is made of sterner stuff so they can come.

She hunts around her room for her favourite mug (it’s pink) and her favourite spork (also pink) and a plastic box with a lid which makes an excellent bowl and plate. And yes, they are both pink too. She always thinks camping stuff in brown or green is silly, as soon as you put it down or you drop it it’s invisible! Pink is much better. You can see it right away. She never loses things camping. Though that’s what her grand pere says is famous last words though how they’d be famous is something of a mystery. Like other things adults say when they’re trying to clever.

.....

Matthew Brown is enjoying some much needed r and r at home before going out East. He’ll have to overlap with Hannibal for a week or so which ain’t perfect, but isn’t awful either. He can make nice if he must. He’s begun a list of things to take which he adds to just every now and again as they occur to him. At present though he’s just meandering around on social media. Oh. Ok. Some thing on Tattle Crime has caused a little flurry and is trending. Oh. The moth thing. That Hannibal’s Will Graham is into?

Yeah. Well. He scrolls past and then just clicks back to have a little look. He doesn’t really get past the first paragraph. Ok. Just for clicks sake probably. And sure, he doesn’t really envy Will Graham and the job he does. Even if.. well, Ok, he’s moving past that now. For sure. Right. Whatever this is it’s not looking great. He frowns a little. Damn. Another body. Nasty stuff. He scrolls on.

.....

Bev and Jimmy nudge each other. The composite artist has done his best. But all they've really got is some bland guy who could be anyone. Bev knows she mostly saw the hat and that his eyes looked sore. And she didn't really think about much beyond that. Jimmy had questioned whether the guy had a tache but they couldn't even agree about something as simple as facial furniture. The good news is that the dumpster uniform has arrived and Brian and Cassie are currently searching and testing it to destruction. If there's anything to be hit off it they'll find it.

It's true that if the guy has never been arrested then they're looking at after arrest fact rather than it helping them find him now, but, well, the case has got to be made in court. Eventually. With any luck. Unless he goes for suicide by cop or fed. Which isn't so unlikely. Though the history on arresting serials is pretty good. If they're identified. Bev would rather not think about the ones that are utterly unknown and invisible, who do their thing, for however long, and then, just quietly slip away. Probably dying in some care assisted living place. She kinda hopes their past haunts them. But she's pretty sure things don't work out that way.

The artist looks at the two of them.

"Best we can do? Yeah. Good try. If you send me the email I'll get it up to the sherif's office. See if they recognise him. We could hit lucky. Might be a local."

They think he's being kind. And maybe he is. Just a little. Got to be hell dispiriting he thinks. The news went round the building like wildfire. Shit storm of a case all in all. And smart of the guy. Real smart. Probably. If he's not in the system anywhere.

.....

Bella considers the look on Jack's face. He's made it home at a sensible hour, just for once, but it's not sounding great all told, and yeah, she can see Freddie's point of view as well as Jack's. And it's not really like him to jump on something. They must all be feeling it.

"You talked to Fred lately?"

"Fred? Me? With Will yeah. I saw him couple of days ago."

Bella looks what Jack thinks of as her mother's special look.

"You mean just for me? No. Not for a while. You think I should?"

She carries on with the steady look so he takes his glasses off and wipes his hand over his face.

"Honestly it's killing me. This thing with the trooper, the kid, the new body. Freddie. Will. Tier. God. And that's just this case. Oh and whoever the actual fucker is."

"The Colonel not been on to you yet?"

Jack sighs again.

"Even better. His general. Because of the whole poster campaign. Wanting to check that the Tattle Crime coverage wouldn't blow it. Apparently his wife reads the tabloids and can put two and two together with the best of them."

"The Judge? Really?"

“Yeah. Really. Although he did admit that she only got it because she’s got an in. Actually it made me wonder if she’d have to recuse herself it it comes in front of her.”

Bella raises her eyebrows.

“I’ve been wondering if you all ought to.”

“You’re not alone. Prurnell is looking at it. See if we’re all too close. They’re talking about doing an internal.”

“An investigation? Really?”

He slumps down a little in his chair and leans hard on the table top, his dinner plate set to one side, only half eaten. He’s hell hungry but he’s no appetite.

“Only a review at this stage but that’s bad enough.”

Bella nods. It is.

.....

Cassie juggles the telephone under her chin as she makes notes on the conversation she’s having with the shop where the carpet came from. They think the victim found rolled up inside was about number five. Which puts them more or less directly before or after Margot Verger. And bless all the saints and angels that look after forensic scientists, the trace might have been rubbish, but the original tag was still attached. Not with where it was sold, nothing as useful as that but with a serial number and supplier which is how she has eventually tracked down the small department store that sold it six years ago.

Of course they don’t have the detail to hand on who bought it but the shop assistant says she can find a manager who maybe will be able to look at the paper records currently languishing in the basement. Cassie assures her that if it would help she could come up there herself and look. The assistant laughs and promises to call her back as soon as her manager returns from lunch. She’s got some thing to go to with her kid but will be back by three. Hopefully. Cassie believes her, and really hopes the post it note won’t get lost on the manager’s desk or spike.

.....

Mischa laughs down the line.

“Camping? Really? In solidarity”

“No, just to keep out of the way until the fuss dies down. Will and his in-laws have had journalists sniffing round. Oh. Were you joking?”

He makes a small sad noise and she’s gentler then,

“I’m sorry. I won’t tease any more. That sounds sensible. And is Will all right?”

“I think so. Possibly too sanguine about it. He thinks it will die down if everyone leaves it alone.”

“Isn’t that possible?”

Hannibal is quiet for a moment but then manages.

“I just miss them and I am somewhat worried.”

She’s still kind when she says,

“They had to manage before you, you know?”

“But they shouldn’t have to now.”

She is just a little sharper when she says.

“And you punishing yourself for something you can’t help is assisting how exactly?”

It’s a fair question, albeit probably rhetorical. Would that we all had friends who call us on the punitive behaviour that corrodes our own souls. Usually. Most of the time. Unless we need a good wallow. Which he thinks he might. He decides not to labour the point.

.....

“Hey, Dolores? Got a post it stuck to your shoe. You been walking that all around the shop?”

Dolores Umber glances down, Oh, right, bright pink. She tips her heel up and reaches down so she can get at the little slip of paper and then frowns some at the message. Ok. Some girl in Virginia. Going on the area code at least. Can she call them. About an invoice? Weird. Ok. Ten before five. Ok. Maybe do it now. She’s probably still there and the paperwork she ought to look at will still be on her desk in the morning so she might as well get this out of the way. She gets out her cell and tries but the number’s busy so she resolves to call the following day, making a note on her cell to remind her to do it in the morning.

.....

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 95

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Frankie looks at the doctor in absolute shock.

“But that’s not possible. I mean. It shouldn’t be. I mean. Damn.”

The doctor looks at her, not without sympathy.

“You’ve got lots of options. You’re only a few weeks.”

“Well damn. I just got measured for my wedding dress.”

“Oh. Ok. So you think you want to continue with the pregnancy.”

Frankie smiles.

“Yeah. I do. It’s a surprise. But yeah. I think my fiancé will be made up about it. He’s serving overseas right now. But he’s coming back on a three year cycle real soon. Wow. I’m gonna call it good timing!”

The doctor actually laughs.

“All right. Not quite the response I expected. I’m glad it’s good news for you. I’ll make sure you’re referred. If your partner is a Soldier you might be entitled to different benefits. I’ll make sure one of the reception staff checks out what the rules are. Are you going to be in military accommodation?”

Frankie goggles a bit. Housing? Shit? She’d kind of assumed they’d use her place. But maybe not. It’s a bit of a drag to Washington. The doctor smiles again.

“I can see you’ve got a lot to work through. No matter. As I say. Early days. It’d be worth asking your partner about what the deal is, or if there is someone you can talk to about it all.”

“Yeah. Right. God. It was bad enough with the wedding. I’ll have to make a whole bunch of calls. Right?”

They make cheery parting noises and as Frankie is leaving the doctor smiles,

“Don’t forget to talk to the people making your dress!”

Frankie rolls her eyes.

“Yeah. Damn. That fabric is expensive!”

“By the yard?”

Frankie nods and makes a face. Damn. Yeah. By the yard, not the dress!

.....

The tension is palpable when the pastor comes into the Verger's living room. Marissa tries for friendly but her voice is quavery. Mason gets up to steer Reba to a seat.

"Hello all. Mason gave me a call, asked me to come and be with you. I'm sure you must be sorely tried by this news."

There is a small pause and then Molson reaches over and squeezes the pastor's hand.

"It's hard, is what it is. It's hard."

Reba nods towards the sound of his voice and doesn't let go of his hand.

"What in the news is new to you?"

It's not a bad sort of question and Marissa sighs into the answer.

"Only the sharper connection to this killer they're tracking. We knew she was murdered of course. We knew that. Even if others wavered. We knew. I think Will did too. But that they might have a lead? Well, that's new."

Reba nods and feels her way to Marissa's hand across the table and holds that one too.

"Did any of you think of it before?"

Mason sighs a bit.

"Honestly? Maybe? A little. Because Will's been so stressed. But that could have just been because they decided she was definitely killed, not by who?"

Reba nods again.

"So he might have known it? But maybe, with an open case, he wasn't allowed to say?"

Mason and Marissa nod miserably.

"Yeah. Maybe. I wish he had though. If he did know."

"Sure. I can see that. But maybe he really wasn't permitted to. Because it might impact the case that could be made against the guy when he's caught? I expect he'll have done some work on some of the cases before they figured it out. Maybe he had to recuse himself or something?"

It's Molson who answers then.

"That's fair. If he could void some evidence or something? Yeah. That's fair. Would they have to go back and recheck it? If he's connected to a victim?"

She shrugs a little.

"I don't know really how these things work. But if there was a danger of it compromising the investigation or the prosecution? I think he'd back off really fast. Don't you?"

The others nod, and she can feel the tension ease off.

"Why don't we pray a little. Find some comfort in some kind words?"

They all bow their heads. And Reba begins.

.....

Buster grabs the frisbee and then narrowly avoids being caught by Will's father, dashing between his legs at the last second. He tears around the clearing beside the campground and doesn't seem too dismayed when everyone else more or less collapses in a heap beside their cooking area.

"Gimme some coffee Will. Honestly I'm plum tuckered."

Abigail giggles. She's been making her grandpere read her Laura Ingalls Wilder and he's thrown some of the vernacular into his speech the last few days. Plum tuckered indeed!

Will smirks a little and settles the kettle to boil on the little gas stove. Some things they cook over a permitted open fire and some things, namely water for essential and urgent hot drinks they do on the burner.

"You want me to make a start on some food?"

Beau drops into a low deck chair beside Will and Abigail leans against him. Winston stays out on the blanket they've put down. If she moves there's always a chance Buster will nip in and steal her spot. She's learned that the hard way.

"Grandpop?"

He raises an eyebrow.

"Is that what we're going with now? All right. I'll bite." He makes a face at Will. "Unlike the fish."

She wrinkles up her nose, the absence of fish is both good and bad. She dearly loves fresh caught but she feels so sad to see them wriggle and gasp their way to an inevitable death.

"Is it called a pup tent because the dogs sleep in it?"

She's wondered about this for a while but never thought to ask. Her father smiles at her as he unpacks some eggs and bread and bacon from one of their cool boxes.

"Good question Abs. Not as far as I know. But maybe pere knows? Is it an army thing?"

His father shrugs.

"I dunno either. I never asked. Honestly, I don't know where you two got your inquisitives from. Sure ain't me. And not your mom either Will. Margot? I dunno? Was she big on questions?"

"Hard to say. Big on avoiding answers. For any kind of question, that'd be the Molson effect I guess. She didn't mind asking them I suppose. But she kept things kind of minimal."

Abigail listens attentively. She's aware that recently her daddy has talked a little more about her mom, and maybe a little less guardedly. Maybe it's because she's getting older? Or maybe he isn't so scared of her memory any more? She does wonder if adults are scared of people who have died. Some of them seem so reluctant to talk about anyone who has. And their faces get all scrunched up like they're really frightened. Though maybe they're just sad. Sad and scared are hard to tell apart. Just sometimes, and with some people. Like her daddy.

There's a lull in the conversation. Buster comes back, with the frisbee for once, rather than having abandoned it somewhere and he settles down beside Winston, more or less on the blanket.

"I'm going to make eggy bread and bacon? We've got ketchup too. And then some apple pie and custard. Ok for both of you? Maybe thirty minutes."

Abigail hops off to her little tent, the one she shares with the dogs, and brings back her French knitting. The snake, in turquoise and a shimmery blue is now twice as tall as her and the dogs and maybe her daddy too. But she's still got quite a bit of yarn to go so she thinks that Frankie will probably say it's not long enough yet. That's all right. She's quite good at focusing on things and finishing them too. Bev called her a 'completer finisher' and she quite likes the sound of that. She's a fan of lists and things you can say 'tick done' to.

After they've eaten and washed up Will smiles a little secret smile she sort of thinks is a Hannibal smile and then passes her a letter with her name on. It hasn't got their address so it must have come in an envelope to her daddy, but it's Hannibal's writing for sure. They've had so long seeing him and then emails and calls that it's been a while since there was an actual letter. Good. Maybe that's why her daddy seems especially happy today too?

.....

Cassie finishes the call to the shop. Honestly? They've played telephone tag for two days and then the poor woman had to go down into the basement to look through the boxes of paperwork the store insists on keeping but barely files. With only the year of supply to the shop and the estimated time of death she has had a window of six months to look through. In the end the woman was brilliant and actually got her son to help out. It must have been a hell of a job. She sent Cassie a picture of the boxes they had to look through. But at least now the paperwork has been scanned and is on its way.

She opens up the workflow email and refreshes the page every fifteen seconds or so. When it comes in she prints off several copies to take to Jimmy as the lead tech on the case. God, this is great she thinks. Real progress. And it only took four days. She high fives herself.

Jimmy takes it from her and smiles at the attached photo. Then he gets all sort of slow and looks at her.

"What's the name of the woman you spoke to?"

"Dolores? She was great. Did you see how much they had to look through. Honestly it could have taken all week. Her son actually went in and helped her!"

"And what's her surname?"

She frowns, it's there on the email, so she points at it.

Fuck he thinks. Just fuck. And this isn't Cassie's fault at all. Someone should have checked with her. Small town. Well, relatively small area at least. Shit. And ahh, that should probably have been him.

"Cassie? Do you know what she said to her son about the case?"

She frowns, beetling her brows.

“I only told her we were trying to track down the person who bought the carpet. Nothing about the case. Why Jimmy? What’s the problem? Is there one?”

“If there is it’s not yours. They did sell the carpet then? And not to her?”

Cassie drags him over to the laptop and scrolls down the page until they get to the scanned in image.

“There. Before Mrs Umber even worked there, she’s only been there four years. Can you see?”

Jimmy leans in. None the wiser. Not anyone they’ve questioned for certain.

“I’ll have to tell Jack but I think I dodged a bullet. Next time remind me not to be an idiot and make sure you’re completely up to speed on an investigation.”

She looks at him with a question in her eyes,

“Umber is the name of the kid who interned last year? Might just be connected to the case? Might be one of the emailers.”

Her eyes go round. Oh. Oh dear.

.....

Roland smiles at the receptionist again. Really this whole making friends and influencing people thing is kind of still going ok.

“You want Mr Leeds to write you a reference? For college?”

“If that’s ok? I realise I’m not strictly his patient, but he does know me better.”

She smiles. Honestly, he’s improved no end these last few months. Used to be right surly and monosyllabic. But somethings changed. And Mr Leeds surely won’t mind about a reference.

“Just you and your mom isn’t it?”

She drops her voice a little but he still frowns.

“Yeah. Why?”

“There’s normally a charge for personal letters and the like. But this isn’t really the same thing so I’m sure we’d waive it. I’ll send him a quick screen message and see if he’s willing, in principle.”

A few minutes later she laughs at something on the screen.

“He says ‘no problem’, and ‘go get ‘em tiger’. Which I think is meant to be encouraging. Honestly, he’s got no idea.”

“So you think that will be alright?”

“He’ll write something by the end of the week. And he says you can use his name on any forms. You need the practice headed paper for all the qualifications and so on? Might look good?”

He nods, pleased at the idea and she hands over some of the headed paper from the opticians' office, putting a line across the blank space.

"Not that I think you'll forge our signature or anything. Standard practice."

He nods. He can kind of see why they might have to. Can't be too careful with all these weirdos around. Sweet. This is gonna be much easier than he thought.

Chapter End Notes

Just a friendly reminder there will be a part 2!

At the end of the next chapter I'll make sure I add in the series link so that if you want to be able to subscribe to the series then you'll be able to.

If you fancy reading my other stuff, well, I've 25 stories on the go at present. A mix of canon, AU, trope, post Twotl, the works... please feel warmly invited to subscribe to me as an author not just this series.

And look at you reading to chapter 95! How awesome are you?

And if you caught that Frankie was pregnant- nicely done...

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 96

Will can just about make out the figures on his old analogue watch. As a kid he'd been beyond delighted to get it for his birthday, with its luminous hands and tiny luminous dots where the numbers would usually be. It had a kind of minimal aesthetic which appealed to him even then. And even better his mom had replaced the strap with some suede so that it could be tied round his wrist, not just fastened, and the back of the watch didn't come in contact with his skin.

There'd been some bad experiences with metal and him wailing about how it burned so she was taking no chances she said. He looked like a pirate she'd said, kissing him lightly on the hair, his curls just the same colour and kink as hers. He can't remember if she was around for another birthday. Maybe that was the last one before she went.

It's just after 4am. He puts the watch carefully back into one of his shoes and instead grabs up the little head torch he stores there with his wallet and ring overnight. He smiles to himself, feeling just a little frisson of naughtyness. He grins properly then. He can just make out the dogs snoring in the nearby tent. And there's no sound at all from the camper shell where his dad is hopefully fast asleep. Good. He can take his time. God he thinks. Is letter sex even a thing? It's gonna be now. He carefully pushes aside the sleeping bag, pushes down his shorts and starts to the-read Hannibal's letter. Just for a moment he wonders if anyone else checks the post coming out of the base, for sensitive information mainly. He decides he really doesn't care, not right now.

.....

With the name of the purchaser of the rug from the store where Mrs Umber works, you'd think it would all be straightforwards. But they hit a dead end. Real fast. The woman who bought the rug died maybe six months after she bought it. Clear as anything. And damn, at Thanksgiving, which has got to have been terrible for all her family. From the medical examiners report they can see that it was ruled an accident. But the exact details aren't that clear.

The records turn out to be in a bit of a mess and it's down to Cassie to chase them over the next couple of days. For all that she likes crevices and blitzing maggots she's quite keen on closing down leads and clues. In her own head she privately thinks it's all grist to the mill for any big forensic thriller she might write in the future. The one which will really show everyone what truly goes on in crime scene labs. Ha.

Eventually she trails back to Jimmy.

"Ok. It sounds like it was a bit terrible really. She had two children with her who also died. But they had different family names so I'm guessing she kept her maiden name when she got married. So, the husband, he moved house a couple of times since then. Retrained I think. Changed his name too, maybe went with his mom's unmarried name? I don't know there wherefores. Different anyway. From when he was married."

Jimmy looks at her.

"Long story short Cass?"

“What? Oh. Yeah. Sorry about that. So. He’s called Abel Gideon. And, get this, he still lives and works in the area.”

Jimmy brightens. Not such a shit storm of a week after all.

“Nice job Cassie. I bet that was an effort.”

He holds up a hand.

“Don’t tell me now. Save it for when we catch the guy. If this is even him. For all we know he got rid of the carpet when his wife died.”

Cassie frowns.

“We have to get lucky some time Jim.”

I hope so he thinks, I honest to god really hope so as the end of the next cycle is getting perilously close if Garret and Lydia had it right about the moths.

.....

Will hums a little, and Beau can’t help but marvel at the change in him over the last nine months, his own kind of gestation period coming to fruition. What a relief it is. What a huge, and perhaps if he’s a little more brutally honest with himself than is exactly comfortable, what an unexpected relief it is to him. Perhaps, he thinks, perhaps he’d really given up on himself even more than he had on Will. The guys in AA talk about making amends. Really that’s what he’s doing. And he’d like to believe it’s not only for his own sake but that it reaches Will too. That’s kind of the point. But you know, baby steps, and one day at a time.

“What you thinking about boy? Something good?”

Will looks up at him from the book he is reading. Ye gods, an actual book with pages and everything. He holds the book up, as if to say well I’m reading duh.

“Nice try, but you ain’t turned a page for ten minutes, and you been humming.”

Will flushes a nice shade of pink. His dad grins. Like that is it. He thought he’d heard a little noise in the night when he got up to take a leak. His waterworks ain’t what they used to be that’s for sure.

“Thanks dad. I’m just great thanks. Actually I was thinking about wedding rings. You know I said we’d get a kind of family ring instead? Maybe as I’ve got you both here we should drive over to the shop I checked out?”

“How far is it?”

“I reckon about ninety minutes. We could make a trip of it. Day after tomorrow, what do you think? I can give the guy a call. I think want them all to match. But something we can get resized for Abigail, or that will expand. Something. One for you too, Hannibal is talking about one for Mischa, maybe.”

Beau looks at Will. His peculiar boy, that somehow, thank all the gods, he has found his way back to, and who was still there to be found.

“I’d like that Will. Very much. I’d be proud to wear it.”

Will gives him a bright uncomplicated smile and he honestly feels moved almost beyond words. Those tears he sheds, those sweet tears. His boy hugs him, as understanding in this as he is in so many things. Even if not all.

.....

Tobias frowns at Miriam.

“A letter? Frankie never writes. Not actual post. Except for birthdays and Christmas. A letter?”

Shit he thinks, something serious then. If she didn’t want to just email, or try for a face call. Something heavy on her heart. Oh god he thinks, please don’t let her have changed her mind. Please. Please. He holds out his hand for the envelope.

Miriam watches as he opens the envelope, sets it aside and then reads the two sides of foolscap. Why is it called that? She distracts herself from the look on his face as she tries to remember, cudgelling her brain for the elusive memory. He puts the papers down. And just looks at her. Something stunned and glad and terrified all in one go.

“Sarge?”

He opens his mouth but no words come out. She tries again.

“Sir? Sergeant Budge? Sir?”

She says it a little sharper and it seems to wake him just a little.

“Frankie! She’s.. that is, we.. she’s.. oh my god. I’m gonna be a dad!”

The other three soldiers in the office tent all look up then, they’ve all heard about Frankie of course, and the umbrellas and the dancing with the mop and the wedding fabrics. And the rest. He has just a moment to think, oh, maybe after the formal? When they were both sweet with music and food and happiness. Oh, and he took those little paper umbrellas out of her hair one by one and kissed her. And more. Much more. Their little brolly baby, no bigger than a pea right now. Oh. Oh.

“Oh Sarge! Oh my god! That’s fantastic!”

He actually hugs her, but it’s ok as everyone hugs him. Even the Colonel does later on. A look of utter delight crossing his face. Hey thinks Tobias. Hey. Maybe the Colonel would stand for her at her naming. He laughs, why does he think it’ll be a girl? He just does. Though a boy would be awesome. And god what will his mom and dad say. And his aunty? Him not even married yet. God. Should they wait? Should they hurry it up? Oh. Damn. So many answers. But he has the most important ones secreted in the warm places of his heart, throbbing for Frankie and little pea, little sweet pea. Oh god. She (or ok, maybe he) is going to be so spoilt. Unless they have another? That’d be a good idea. God.

.....

“Oh. Wow. This is great! Amazing.”

Beau looks up at his boy.

“Will?”

“Text message from Hannibal. Where’s Abigail? Abigail?”

He shouts to her across the campground and then waves when he sees she has heard, she races over, Winston letting her win, Buster distracted at the last minute by a bird swooping low over them.

“Daddy? Daddy? What happened?”

He hugs her and swings her around, her feet utterly off the ground, a little circle of delight. He hasn’t done that for ages, she’d faintly wondered if she’d got too big.

“The best kind of news. Really. Frankie and Tobias are going to have a baby. Ok. It’s very early, and really they shouldn’t be saying yet. Because sometimes things go a little wrong, but this way we can all send them happy thoughts. And he wants us to see her if we can before he’s back.”

“Will it be a little girl or a little boy?”

He smiles.

“Too early to say. Way too early to say. Right now? No bigger than your little pinkie finger Abigail. Not even. But something wonderful to look forwards to.”

Abigail makes a complicated kind of face. But really, there’s a dress and a flower crown at stake here.

“What will they do about the wedding?”

Beau and Will look at each other. Ahh, yes, this could throw a right spanner in the works.

.....

Anthony eyes Bedelia just a little warily. She looks both pleased and perhaps a little conflicted. He debates whether he should ask or if he should let her tell him in her own time, whatever it is. For all that they are very upfront with each other she does play some cards close to her chest. Namely ones that have the name Mischa Lecter on. So, maybe something to do with Mischa then.

“Coffee darling?”

She absently holds out her cup to him and continues with whatever it is she is reading. It certainly seems to be absorbing.

“Croissant?”

She holds out her plate.

“Jam?”

She holds out her hand and he passes her the jar.

“Butter too?”

“Anthony, if you want to ask something or simply want some attention do feel free to say so.”

“No no. No. Not really. I’m fine. Well. Actually. What’s got you all cogitating?”

“This?”

She holds up the papers, a print out of a article she has been reading.

“Nothing really. Just a paper by a colleague. Interesting really. They describe someone who honestly sounds a lot like Hannibal’s Will Graham. I’m just wondering if it is. It’s anonymous of course, but, well. I’m just considering. And if so, if he knows someone has written up his symptomology.”

“Can they do that?”

“Well. No. It isn’t precisely ethical. Though they might say the anonymisation should be enough to protect the person’s identity. But, well, there’s just one or two things I recognise from discussions with Mischa.”

“Is it a well known journal?”

“Fairly well known. European of course. Not so widespread in the US, though the doctor is based here. Perhaps they thought it more likely they’d get away with it if they published overseas. I wonder if I ought to tell Mischa or even Will himself. Or perhaps warn my colleague there will be repercussions if they’ve overstepped the line.”

Anthony rubs his hands.

“Not like you to stir sweetest.”

“Perhaps not, but I could imagine he’d be rather dismayed to see this in public. Perhaps I’ll speak to him direct. Especially as the others almost certainly won’t have seen it. And Anthony?”

She frowns at him somewhat.

“It’s not what I’d consider stirring.”

.....

Adopt a Soldier AU Part 97

Chapter Summary

Thanks to everyone who's been so patient.. writing hiatus more or less over. It's a dead of winter thing.. xxx

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal sighs a little sadly to himself. Mischa has sent him a copy by email of the journal article that Bedelia found and he's trying extremely hard not to let it distress him. He has spent a careful half hour wording a message to Will only to recall that they're still off in the wilds somewhere on their running-away from it all camping expedition. He shifts around in his chair. Really he must concentrate on the documentation that will complete Matthew's transfer in to the base and his transfer out. How the time is both flying and dragging.

He glances at the paper calendar on his desk. He's been tearing off a sheet each day, a countdown to home. And Matthew is supposed to arrive sometime in the next 48 hours depending on the weather and various activity going on in adjacent airspace. By the time they have had a chance to do a handover Hannibal will be only a few days away from leaving.

Truth be told? His bags are already packed. They have been almost since it became clear that what had been six months had telescoped dramatically into something much more bearable. He's even managed to visit some of his friends in the local souk, the embroiderers in particular to collect a Preller cover, a good leatherworker, two silversmiths and the man who sells the dodgy provenance but nevertheless beautiful carpets and scraps of antique fabrics.

Really he should do a background check or ask the MPs to make sure none of his soldiers are inadvertently shipping home rather more portable antiquities. The local museum security have been doing a roaring trade in so called 'genuine fakes' and it bothers him. Something for Matthew Brown to take forwards maybe? Even something with an easy win to get him into some higher ups good books. He thinks that in some small way he might currently owe Matthew. Just a little. Hannibal has packed two tiny statuettes mainly with a mind to have them evaluated at the Smithsonian when he gets home. Just in case.

Oh god. Home. Home. Home. So near. And yet, right this moment, still more than a week away. He can hardly stand it. He takes a deep breath and determines to finish at least half an inch of paperwork before he takes a walk round the base and has a coffee with Sergeant Budge and Corporal Lass. He smiles at the thought. That, at least, is something good to focus on.

.....

Will stretches in the driving seat of his dad's truck. Beside him, squashed between them on the front bench, Abigail is mostly asleep. His dad has his eyes closed but he's keeping up a steady hand

tap against his thigh in time to the rhythm of the music on the radio so Will know he's just metronoming their way across the state lines.

In the back Winston is dreaming good dog happy tales if her occasional snorts and whimpers and thump of her tail are anything to go by. Buster is sitting up, tongue lolling, looking around, interested. Just now and again Will catches his eye in the rear-view mirror and if anything the dog pants harder in recognition that Big is paying attention with him, a mutual keeping watch and regard for one another.

This, Will thinks, this is almost as good as it gets. The only thing that could improve on matters is if Hannibal were here, and really with hardly more than a week to go Will is pretty content. Other good news, and he half grins a lopsided sort of smile at the thought, is that nothing much seems to have come of Freddie's article. There'd been an initial flurry of comments on the website, but these had either petered out or sidetracked off into wider and wilder theories about moth-man. Will had barely featured. Turns out that all those who had been too close to see the bigger picture had indeed not got the measure of things.

No one cares. If it had all been in print the relevant edition of TattleCrime would now be just wrapper for some fish supper or take out or been scrunched round crockery in a packing case. As it is? Well, the internet is forever and to be sure some future researcher might put it all together and add six and six and make a surprising baker's dozen but right now? Right now, it's done, finished. No one actually really cares. Will had been right. Freddie too. Though no one really wants to give her the credit for the good call she made.

Will's grateful though for the space Jack insisted he have, grateful too that the school didn't make too much fuss, and that his dad just jumped right on in. So maybe his little flurry of panic was worth it. And it's been just enough time to get his head round Hannibal's early return, all the fizz and planning that occurred in something of a rush, and the last few things that will help tie the wedding all together. Hopefully. He smiles to himself. Rings. Glasses. Photo guy. And then? Well and then it's all more or less sorted. More or less. Probably.

.....

Bev kicks her heels against the bar of the stool she's sitting on. Jimmy fiddles with some carpet fibre analysis and it's attendant documentation. Brian pretends to be absorbed in some on screen data set he's supposed to be making notes on. Something about astronomical alignments and the last few body drops. Some theory about placement and timing or some shit that Garrett and Lydia have come up with in the other team. The math makes him feel faintly dizzy and weightless, stats were never his strong suit and this is more like applied algebra. Ugh.

Really though? Really they are all eavesdropping on Cassie's call to the sheriff's department back where the last but one body was found. They're hoping someone on the ground can go check out Abel Gideon. They've got a mailing address which he seems to use for all his correspondence but it's not clear if it's actually residential. She's taking notes, the phone tucked under her chin as she uh-huhs her way through the conversation.

At the end she grins happily as she finishes up the call.

"Ok. It is a mail service. He had some hate mail after his wife and kids died. Aren't people just peachy? Anyway there were some questions raised locally about the service history on the car and a few people were pretty vocal about laying the blame at his door. Some question over insurance on the kids, and some records of noise disturbance complaints about arguments at the house.

Anyway." She catches the look Jimmy is giving her. "Anyway, long story short. The local PD are aware and they've got a street address." She waves her notebook in the air a little. "So. Yeah. The deputy says he can hang by and ask about the carpet. Knows him well enough apparently just to show up. Are we ok with that?"

Jimmy makes a face. Glances at Bev.

"I'm thinking we should run it by Jack. The link's pretty good. But. And it's a big but, we have nothing absolutely conclusive tying Gideon to the carpet.' He sees their faces, "I know, I know. Sure his wife bought it but that's a fair while ago. Maybe he got rid of it? A recent purchase, maybe they chose it together, maybe he couldn't bear to look at it. Once she'd died. Cassie can we email the sheriff's office a picture of the carpet get him to ask Gideon if he recognises it. Nothing more or less."

Bev makes a face.

"What about the kid. What if he recognises it?"

They pause, so she picks it up again.

"I can't see a way round effectively tipping them off, either of them."

"The kid's been kind of tipped off already. If he was going to do something about the enquiry wouldn't he have done it already? And if Gudeon was the guy at the body dump masquerading as our helpful trooper he already knows we've got the carpet. Might even be waiting on us."

They thrash the issue round some more. By the time Jack arrives they've more or less agreed the deputy should see if Abel Gideon responds to the i.d. on the carpet in any way, and that they'll keep an eye on him straight after if the locals can marshal the staff. They also agree that the time has come to make a move on the kid. Time for a face to face.

Bev scrunches her face a little as they finish up for the day.

"Cassie? I meant to ask, what's Gideon's job?"

Cassie blinks.

"Oh yeah. He re-trained. Went back to school. He's some kind of PhD. Did Research before? He's got a few published papers under his previous name. But you know? I'm not sure what he's doing now. Damn. I'll call the deputy back."

.....

The General hums over his morning cup of coffee as he opens his private mail at the breakfast table. His wife looks over the top of her glasses and over the top of her news paper. Something so satisfying about a good rustling broadsheet first thing in the morning with a coffee pot to hand and some decent toast, unsalted butter and confit.

"Darling?"

The General shrugs a little.

"Some stirring little shit sent me something in the post. I'm debating the value of following it up."

She raises her eyebrows at him.

“Following up? On the person who sent it or whatever it’s about?”

He hums again.

“Maybe both. I think it’s Will Graham. About him I mean.”

He leans across the table as he hands his wife the letter and she sets aside her paper to read through it.

She reads through it and he watches her face carefully, sees the tightening expression round the corners of her mouth. He’s not so surprised at her summary.

“How very distasteful of them to send it to you. You’re aware of his unusual neurology? Aren’t you? We talked about it.”

“We did. And yes. He talked it over with me quite extensively when the poster campaign first came up. Someone is definitely stirring. Though quite who they’re targeting is less clear. Could be me, could be Dr Graham, might even be Hannibal. Nasty of them though.”

“No markers on the envelope.”

He sighs, and then turns the envelope over in his hands.

“Nothing obvious. I’ll have to send it someone. Maybe I should contact the Crawford guy. He’d know what to do.”

Judge Davies nods briefly and goes back to the news paper.

“Sounds like a plan to me. And in the meantime?”

The General taps the letter against the table a few times whilst he considers.

“I think I’ll let Hannibal know. He should be aware that someone is trying to stir things for him, or the both of them.”

His wife looks up at him.

“It couldn’t be Matthew Brown could it?”

The General blinks. Ahh, that would be especially stupid of Brown, but it isn’t beyond the realms of possibility.

.....

The airfield windsock is practically horizontal and Sergeant Budge and Hannibal stand hunched into their coats as they wait for the aircraft to taxi to a stop. Although they are in the lee of the main hangar the wind is biting and both of them are glad that at least the transporter is on time.

When the plane comes to a stop there’s a short delay before the staircase is shoved into place and the passengers make their way down the rather rickety steps. Hannibal glances at his Sergeant and they make their way towards the figure who is last but one off.

Hannibal extends his hand,

“Colonel Brown. You’re a sight for sore eyes. Welcome. We’ll get you to your quarters and then give you a little time to settle in. How’s that sound?”

Matthew smiles.

“Thank you Sir. I’d appreciate half an hour to get myself used to the fact that it’s much colder than I expected!”

Hannibal smiles.

“I’ll leave you my coat when I go. Can’t have you freezing to death just after you’ve arrived.”

Matthew grins back.

“Decent of you. Thanks. Ok. Hot drink as well? I’d kill for a decent coffee.”

The Sergeant steps in to take Matthew’s grip from him, just his on-flight luggage, everything else will get delivered later with any luck.

“Ahh. Sir. Decent coffee? That’s not quite so easy. But we’ll do our best.”

Matthew turns and looks at Hannibal again.

“I like this guy. Can I keep him?”

Hannibal smiles a small smile. When he wants to Matthew can be most engaging.

“I’m sorry. I think he’s spoken for. Shall we?”

Matthew smirks a little as he follows the direction of Hannibal’s gaze to the waiting armoured jeep.

“We shall.”

If Hannibal rolls his eyes just slightly, he might be forgiven for doing so. Matthew can be engaging but he’s never quite clear on where the lines should be, or have been drawn. Oh well. Only a few days to get through. He tries not to sigh audibly.

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Chapter End Notes

Given I wrote this on the tube it’s amazing I’ve only found one glaring typo!

Adopt A Soldier AU Part 98

Chapter Notes

> Happy Easter folks.
>
> And if you fancy a Fannibal convention in Toronto in October 2018 then FannibalFest2 is for you! The Kickstarter for early tickets and goodies runs until the 5th April. It's gonna be a blast. Whoever gets the KS over the $35000 mark gets a 1000 word fic from me. I'm hoping that's an incentive!

Abigail looks up at her grandfather.

"Why is daddy kicking the tyre?"

The two of them turn to where Will is standing by the rear of the pick-up having thoroughly vented his feelings on the flat they've got.

"It's something grownups do honey. Punish something that's already let them down." He lifts his voice a little louder. "I gotta spare in the shell."

Will looks up.

"Really? I thought you couldn't be bothered with that kind of thing?"

His dad grimaces. There was a lot he couldn't be bothered with when he was mostly a full sheet to the wind on a daily basis.

"Bad habit of mine. I grew out of it. Eventually. Should be a jack in there too and the rest."

Will suddenly smiles broadly.

"Abs, people will tell you an old dog can't learn new tricks. Your grandpere is living proof that isn't so. All right then. Abs we'll get you the chair and set you up with a book or the snake. Stay put ok? I know the road is quiet but some of the semis are big enough to pull little girls over with the slipstream thing. Got it?"

He speaks seriously enough that she understands he really means it and isn't playing around so she nods earnestly.

"Snake please. And is there a juice box? Tentacles is really thirsty?"

Her dad smiles a little.

"Sure. Let's get you sorted. Pere? This is gonna take a bit. You got coverage on your cell? We might want to find a motel or something. I know it's only another hour but they'll be closed at the shop by the time we're done and back on the road, don't you think?"

His dad nods and digs round in his jean's back pocket for his phone. It's a simple model but he can make it do its thing thank you very much. Will gets a few odds and ends from the front seat for Abigail and sets her up safely off the road and away from the lure of any big trucks pushing through against their tachometers.

By the time they're actually digging round in the camper shell under the mattress for the spare and the pump and the jack and the goddam rest Will's good humour of earlier in the day is mostly restored. He laughs and his dad smiles over at him in surprise.

.....

Matthew Brown looks a little refreshed even if he's had only forty minutes to get acquainted with his quarters and the basic lie of the land on the base. The journey back from the airfield had been easy as these things go. A couple of checkpoints, a few landmarks to help orientate him later, a few reminiscences on Hannibal's part. A few mild warnings and tiny snippets of orientation. Enough to be going on with. He feels ok. Good if anything, and good to actually be out of an office for a change. He'd almost forgotten the feeling.

As he walks towards the mess tent he smiles a little. If anything he's doing rather better than Hannibal is. He looks a little strained round the edges. Well there could be all kinds of reasons for that. Maybe he'll do a little digging. Find out what's exercising the soon to be General Lecter. He rolls his eyes a little. At least Hannibal isn't pulling rank too obviously though they're both observing the proprieties. Playing nice. He smirks a little. Thinks about how good the sex had been, just for a moment. His eyes narrow against the glare of the sunlight.

.....

Jack is having a harder job than he expected getting a warrant for the search of the Umber kid's house. And the news from the sheriff's office isn't great either. Gideon agreed easily enough that the carpet had been his but that he'd passed it on to a thrift store only a few weeks after his wife had died in the car crash that horrible Thanksgiving. He'd hoped maybe someone would get a bargain over the holiday season, he couldn't even walk on it without thinking of her. The deputy had drunk a cup of coffee with the guy, reminisced a little over the fall out from the case, admired just how far Abel had come since. They'd left it on friendly terms and frankly that doesn't help Jack anything worth a damn.

The team sit round morosely considering the issue. Eventually Brian sighs.

"Ok, so the carpet's been through the ringer. But just how used does it look apart from the wear and tear from the elements? Could it have been on a floor somewhere before it was dumped? Did someone really buy it from the thrift store and use it at home or work or something? Maybe Gideon's not our guy. Did the deputy take a photo of him?"

Cassie checks back through her notes.

"He's sending it. He can't work out how to link his camera to their laptop."

"Didn't he use a phone?"

She grimaces.

“He had some complicated story about his cell camera not working or the lens being cracked but he took a picture of Gideon with his proper camera for some club or society they’re involved in? One of his colleagues is bringing a cable from home. I don’t know. They’re a bit overwhelmed their end.”

Everyone sighs. They all know the problems with budgets and resources but this guy might be implicated in at least fourteen murders! Come on! There’s a kind of restlessness in the team. Maybe, at a subconscious level, no one on the ground quite believes their friend, their colleague, their acquaintance from the golf club, or the country club, or that bar could ever be a serial killer, but no one lives in a vacuum, not entirely. Someone knows their guy. Whether they know it, or like it, or not.

“So we gotta wait. Judge is reviewing the notes before she ponies up the warrant for the Umber kid.”

They take a collective breath in and slowly let it out.

.....

Hannibal frowns into his cup of almost adequate coffee. Sergeant Budge has been called away and Hannibal is marshalling most of his reserves to deal with a smirkingly amused Matthew Brown. To be sure Matthew’s being pretty subtle about it but Hannibal can’t help but wonder if he’s being either flirted with or sent some kind of covert signal that Matthew, should Hannibal be interested, is still available. So to speak.

Matthew for his part leans back in his chair, wiggles to get more comfortable, and puts his head to one side and then rubs a finger along his jaw a little.

“Hannibal? May I ask, off base, just for a moment, what’s the problem? Is it this thing back home with Will?”

Hannibal pauses. He’d mentally decided that Will would be off the table for any conversation between him and Matthew but right now, in the moment, it’s tempting.

“There’s a bad case. It’s difficult.”

Matthew frowns for a moment.

“But he’s ok, right? And the little girl?”

“They’ve had to leave the house. There have been some threats.”

Hannibal swallows and Matthew watches him and then leans towards him a little. He reaches out and for a horrible moment Hannibal thinks he’ll take his hand or something. He doesn’t he just taps him on the back of the wrist.

“Hannibal. I’ve gotta say. You and Will. It’s the real deal, right?”

Hannibal frowns slightly and nods. Matthew frowns right back at him.

“For fucks sake. Why are you still here?”

Hannibal blinks at him and Matthew ploughs right on.

“Look I can swing it with General Davies. He knows what’s going on? Right then. The transporter’s doing a turn around. They’re leaving in another two hours. You’ve got time to get your gear together and go. I can pick the stuff up. Make use of your Sergeant, he’ll keep me on the straight and narrow. Come on. Don’t be an ass about it. Go on. Get going.”

He smirks again at his own slightly misplaced humour and Hannibal looks at him in consternation, just for a moment, trying to stop his train of thought derailing any further. But that would mean..

He stands suddenly.

“All right. Thank you.”

Matthew airily waves a hand.

“Yeah yeah, don’t go all soft on me. Hurry up.”

Hannibal doesn’t need to be told a third time. Matthew smiles to himself. Yeah. Alright. It’s a long game isn’t it?

.....

The motel is one of those mom and pop ones that you hope against hope still exist but usually don’t. Not outside of hallmark movies and saccharine sweet romances. But here it is. After a comfortable night the three of them sit in the attached diner and eat a breakfast of bacon and pancakes, with coffee for Beau, tea for Will and a proper strawberry milkshake for Abigail. With actual strawberries. Will places a call to the ring shop to say they’re stopping by and he can’t help but feel a wash of smugness that actually it’s all going so well. Even the pick-up’s spare turned out to be in good shape. He wonders if he can manage the last pancake. Maybe halves with Abigail whose face is all shiny with syrup.

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Cassie pushes open the lab door in a rush.

“The sheriff sent the picture of Abel Gideon! Is it the guy from the body-dump? The trooper?”

Jimmy and Bev crowd round the tablet in her hands. Jimmy takes it from her to squint at it hard.

“Bev! Fuck! It’s not him. I don’t think. Is it?”

He passes it to her and Bev’s heart sinks.

“It isn’t. He must have passed the carpet to the thrift store after all. Oh god. We’re back to square one aren’t we?”

Jack chooses that moment to open the door from his office,

“Guys! We’ve got the warrant for Umber. Get your gear. We’re on our way.”

He sees their faces.

“What? What happened?”

Bev holds out the tablet.

“Gideon’s not our guy. At least, he’s not the trooper. So..”

“Probably not the killer then.”

He rubs a hand over his face.

“Have we got anything? Tell me we’ve got something.”

Brian holds up a hand.

“We start with the kid. That’s a good place to start. And we try the thrift stores. The carpet’s distinctive. We might get lucky.”

He looks at his colleagues?

“Yeah. I know. But it’s a better than nothing. Really. We’ve had worse.”

It’s true. They have. But not much.

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In Frankfurt Hannibal hops a transporter that has been delayed. Just for once some VIP’s lateness working to his advantage. By the time he arrives at the Andrews airbase it’ll only be five hours after he left, the time difference working in his favour too. He looks at his watch, taps the silver card case in his pocket, his talisman. Probably another few hours to reach home. Or Will. Wherever they are. The signal is spotty on the plane but he might manage something. Perhaps to Jack or Beverly if he can’t reach Will.

.....

In the SUV Jack settles into his seat as Bev gets behind the wheel.

“I had the General in.”

As Bev reverses out of the Quantico parking garage she looks at him.

“This morning? What was that about? Is it Will?”

Jack smiles a little.

“Yeah. But not what you’d think. You know the article?”

“The write up on Will’s wonky brain. Sure. What about it?”

“Apparently someone’s got the wrong end of the stick somewhere. Thought it was part of a campaign to undermine Will, or Hannibal, or their poster campaign strategy.”

Bev smiles.

“Really? But Will collaborated on it.”

“That’s what I told the General. Someone sent him a paper copy. He’d got all worked up about it.”

He smiles slightly.

“He thought it was anonymous, some shit stirrer.”

Bev glances at him again as she pulls out of the lot.

“Come on Jack, and the rest.”

“I had to tell him it was Will’s writing on the envelope. Turned out he hadn’t checked inside properly. There was a post-it. From Will. Just explaining he thought the General ought to know it’d had been published. Even if the cases were anonymised.”

Bev can’t help but laugh a little.

“Gods! Damn! Was he pissed? Shit! He didn’t wind Hannibal up about it did he? I can’t imagine that’d go well. Will must have told him about it.”

She pauses.

“Well, I hope he did. Otherwise who knows what’d happen!”

Jack smiles.

“He mostly wished he’d looked a little more carefully. He was anxious not to smudge any prints.”

“Well, good for him then. If it had been someone fucking around.”

Jack sighs.

“Yeah. That’s what I said. And no harm done.”

Bev grins.

.....

Abigail and Beau look at the rings and expanding bracelets that are all part of a lovely mixed gold range that features the same patterns. They’ve been designed and made by the wife of the guy who owns the shop.

Over by the window Will tries to get reception on his cell. In all the excitement last night he forgot to charge it. Damn. Only 12% power left. Never mind. He’s not expecting anything especially urgent. He’ll charge it whilst they eat lunch. He fishes the opticians’ card out of his wallet. He’s got enough juice to call them. Check it’s ok to come by later and collect a duplicate of his prescription.

The woman receptionist is as friendly as he remembers and confirms they’ll be open in the afternoon though she’ll be finishing up early. She promises to look the script out so that her boss doesn’t have to navigate her filing. He finishes the call. Damn. 7% He switches it off, and rejoins Abigail and Beau to debate the merits of the different styles and options.

The owner makes tea and brings out some of his wife’s biscuits. After all, this could be a big sale, and he’s a nice guy.

The biscuits are awesome.

Adopt A Soldier AU - Chapter 99

Hannibal smiles briefly at the agent from the car hire service as he hands over the keys. Tobias has done a sterling job and made sure that everything on the ground is ready for him the moment he steps off the plane at the joint base at Andrews. He glances at his phone and then frowns a little and opens the email he's been sent. By the General.

Ahhh. Oh. Well. Still, no real harm done as he's only a matter of days ahead of schedule. He smiles a little as he reads down. Oh. Oh. There it is then. Not just him having a slight overreaction. And Matthew has done as promised and completed the paperwork. Good. That won't hurt Colonel Brown either, stepping up when a colleague has a family emergency. And, he's had the thought before, maybe now he really does owe Matthew just a little. Not much. Not given everything that's happened. But just a little. For this suggestion if nothing else.

Hannibal tries Will's cell. But it goes straight to voice mail. Either it's out of range or turned off, or out of juice. One of those. Hopefully. But maybe he can get hold of Beverly or one of the others. Just to find out where Will is.

.....

Abigail is entrusted with the little jewellery bags, all glossy paper and twisted rope handles that Will suspects she will keep for as long as ever can be when you are eight. She packs them carefully in the stow seat in the rear of the pick-up. They should be safe enough there. Buster knows how to be a tough little terrier if his territory is encroached on!

In the front seats Will glances down at his cell as he plugs it in. 5%. He drafts a quick text to Bev just to let them know they've arrived. Just maybe if they get a warrant the team might be in the area later today. They could all meet up. If it hasn't gone badly. Or it hasn't gone down at all. Will frowns a little.

"Pere? You got an actual road atlas here. A paper one?"

His father gives him a quizzical look, but rattles around in the glove compartment in front of the passenger seat. He pulls out a beaten up large scale book. Missing it's cover, with dog-ears and some crumpling. He hands it over, smoothing it out a little as he does so.

"What you thinking of Will?"

"It's just. Well. I only looked at the GPS when we were planning the route. You know? Just the roads we'd take. But actually now I think of it.."

He trails off as his finger traces over the landscape delineated on the map. He takes a breath or two. They really are right in the middle of the whole case. So. When he wondered about the team being close, it's possible they might be right on top of each other. He checks his watch.

"Shall we get something to eat do you think? We could go get the glasses a little later. I think they actually close properly for lunch."

His father turns and looks to the back seat.

“Sure. Curly girlie? You got any thoughts on food?”

Abigail considers her grandfather.

“Pie?”

“Sure thing. Pie it is.”

Will smiles and pulls out into the sedate traffic of the town.

“I think there’s a diner down the block. We can park up there. Jimmy said their pie was pretty good. Shall we see if he’s right?”

.....

Bev glances at her cell. Wow. Ok. Just down the road from where they are. Damn that’s close. She drafts a quick message back to say she’ll ring when she gets the chance and maybe dinner or something might be possible later. Because clearly this is all going to hell straight off the bat.

Mrs Umber cries. So does the sister. Roland is baffled, then angry, then truculent and then baffled. He’s also hugely defensive about the moths, disturbed by the lights, the noise, the sheer volume of people. And really they can all tell within maybe ten minutes that the worst he can be accused of is some misjudged communication with Freddie Lounds, once or maybe twice and an obsession with moths. As for the rest? He’s a teenager. Just a teenager. A slightly geeky, gawky, trying too hard and not hard enough teenager.

It’s a mess.

And no he hasn’t given the moths to anyone. And no he doesn’t really talk to anyone about them, except his teacher and yeah ok his optician who’s writing him a reference for college. And the guys at the Smithsonian. Which takes them briefly back to Randall Tier who it turns out has been in touch just a little too recently for Jack’s comfort. But not so recently it means anything as far as the kid is concerned.

And the mom and the sister don’t know Jack-shit about anything either. And they spend a while trying to explain it’s not the carpet that’s the issue, though she keeps thinking it must be. Even if it was six years ago. More even. But it all takes time and time and time they don’t really have to unravel the little it is.

Bev watches from the side, leaning against a wall, as Brian and Jack go through it one more time with Roland and his mom. When her cell goes off she turns and slips into the kitchen where there are several techs doing a fingertip search. She hovers a little in the doorway, not wanting to get in their way either.

“Hannibal? What the? Where the hell are you?”

She listens carefully. Oh. Well. There’s a thing. So that’s what the Colonel does when he thinks it’s all going really bad. Good for him. Good for Will too. No harm done indeed!

“No. We’re further north? Trying to make an arrest. Will’s with his pa and Abigail. Actually not that far from here. They’re getting the rings? And Will is going to try and get his glasses fixed. Did he tell you? Buster ate the frames. Or tried to.”

They exchange pleasantries. And sure, Bev might be smirking just a little. Colonel Lecter! Epic romantic hero doing the whole knight in shining armour thing. That’s good tease material right there. And she is at least able to more or less tell Hannibal where she thinks Will might be. Eventually they agree that Hannibal will try and find Will and Beau in the small town, either at the jewellers or the opticians or maybe a diner or cafe as it’s close to lunch. And that they will indeed try and all connect later.

Hannibal adjusts the settings on the GPS in the hire car. He hums a little unhappily to himself. Straight up along the I-70 is not what he was hoping for, at least, not for Will. Hasn’t he realised? Though why this should be problematic is harder for Hannibal to put his finger on. He wonders though. Not prescience he thinks, or anything ominous, it’s just that this corridor of land is acting like a sinkhole, something with a denser gravity than the area around, pulling things, pulling people into it. Holding them. Tightly. He puts his foot down on the gas pedal and pulls out into the stream of traffic.

.....

At the first thrift shop they try Jack does the whole grumble thing. Gideon supplied the name, but the shop has moved from its original location and no one who works there was on staff two years ago let alone six. The other branch of the shop at least keeps records of their previous volunteers so that takes them to the home of a pair of elderly men. Who insist on tea. And a chat. And Jack and Jimmy both know that if they push too hard the two guys will clam up faster than a Chesapeake oyster. Patiently Jimmy explains about the carpet, Abel Gideon, and just enough about the case for them to realise it matters.

The two old guys sit beside each other on the couch. The room is cosy and crammed with mementos from a lifetime of antique hunting and maybe foreign travel to interesting places. Faintly Jimmy wonders what the two men did back when they were in paid employment. He can’t decide if they’re brothers or partners, or cousins or something. They’ve an ease with each other but also that kind of cantankerous exchange that suggests long familiarity and a sometime grudging fondness that’s coupled with exasperation. Eventually one of them triggers a memory in the other.

“I do remember. Because I saw it afterwards. Any number of times. In a waiting room. You remember too don’t you?”

There’s a long back and forwards then as the four of them try and unearth what kind of waiting room it was. And where. And who. Eventually the other man frowns.

“But it’s not there now. There’s a different one. Very similar. Slightly different motifs in the corners. I only know because I’ve been to factories, in Turkey, we like to travel. Guided tours. They keep the costs down by taking you to emporia. You know? Jewellers. Leather goods. Carpets. Everyone makes carpets.”

“Yes!” Says his friend. “Yes! The eye fellow! Yes! He said the previous one had something spilled on it. Told me I’d virtually demonstrated I didn’t need a check up if I spotted the difference! He was very complimentary about it.”

Jimmy puts a hand on Jack’s sleeve as they start for the door.

“Didn’t Bev says something about..?”

“Yeah.” Says Jack “Yeah. See if you can get Will. Fuck. Come on. Where’s Bev?”

.....

Inside the ring shop the owner is friendly and pleasant and Hannibal is pleased to see the selection from which Will has made a choice. He explains his desire for a matching ring for his sister as well as earrings for his mother and cuff links for the Count. The shop owner thinks he might just have died and gone to heaven. Between Hannibal and Will’s purchases they’ve paid the rent on the shop for the next three months!

“I think they might have gone for lunch or something. Though the younger man said something about the opticians. They’re usually shut over the lunch period. Or some of it at least unless Gretchen’s got an early day, then they stay open.”

The little man wiggles his eye brows and twiddles the side piece of his own pair of spectacles. Hannibal smiles at the intimacies of small towns and interconnected customers and services. He happily takes a biscuit with him as he follows directions to the cafe the owner thinks they might have chosen.

.....

At the opticians Beau opts to stay outside whilst Will gets his glasses. Inside the reception area there’s a note on the table telling Will to go on back. There’s no one else around. He opens the inner door.

“Mr Leeds? Hey?”

One of the doors off the short corridor within opens and the optician pops his head out.

“Dr Graham? Good. Good. Oh. Is this your little girl? Do you mind if she waits in reception? It’s a bit crowded back here. Always a lot going on.”

He looks worried so Will decides not to push it.

“Sure. Abigail. Could you find a seat. I won’t be a tick. If you need anything..”

“I’ll come and find you or find Grandpere. I can probably see him from the windows.”

She sits herself on one of the plastic chairs and makes sure Tentacles is safely stowed beside her. She smiles to herself as she pulls out her snake of knitting. It’s very easy to do some, even if not much, it all adds up. Eventually. It’s a very long snake now.

Mr Leeds smiles at Will.

“She should be fine out here. After you.”

Will notes the faint tremor in the guy’s voice and is just turning to say something when he catches something from the corner of his eye. Inside the room with the eye charts, the funny steampunk glasses, all the lenses. Someone on the ground, just behind the customer’s chair. He takes a step forwards to look, and suddenly, suddenly it all adds up in his head. Oh. Oh. Fuck. He swivels on

the spot fast. Behind him Mr Leeds is looking horrified. But Will is more worried by the man holding the optician by the arm. Mr Leeds gasps.

“I tried to tell Jame you didn’t know anything. I tried. But he didn’t believe me. I’m so sorry. I really am.”

.....

Hannibal frowns. There’s still no answer from Will’s cell, but maybe Beau has his. He waits, just a little impatiently for the dial tone and then the connection.

“Beau! Excellent I’d almost given up. Long story short. I’m here. Outside the cafe with the pie! I imagine Abigail is feeling a little stuffed by all accounts. Where are you?”

Beau laughs into the phone as Hannibal supplies the slightly longer version. When he turns round from where he is leaning on the pick-up he suddenly spots Hannibal further along the road and waves vigorously. He thumbs the cell phone off and slips it into his rear pocket.

“Hey. This is great. Will’s gonna be made up about this.” He tips his head to the side indicating the shop front. “They shouldn’t be long, just going to get a new pair or something. Buster ate the frames. The lenses are ok. Tell me more about the trip.”

Hannibal sighs and settles into leaning beside Beau.

.....

Abigail tidies the long snake of French knitting into her bag and then slides it under her chair. She twists round in the seat to look out of one of the windows and can just see the car if she cranes her neck a little. Her Grandpere is leaning against the trunk maybe reading something on his cell, or a paperback. She turns as she hears the inner door.

“Abigail? Your daddy says could you come in here just a moment? He’s not sure which frames to go for.”

She smiles and gets off the chair. Forgetting just for a minute that Tentacles was squashed in with her against the armrest. She turns to wave to her grandfather but he’s still reading. Oh. Maybe talking on his phone. She smiles at the optician and remembers to pick up her bag.

“Can daddy see again? Did he tell you Buster ate his glasses?”

The optician smiles a little back at her.

“He sounds very naughty.”

“He really is. I think we’re related.”

She’s ushered out of the waiting room and the door swings shut behind her with a soft half click.

.....

Beau glances down at his wrist watch.

“I wonder what’s keeping them?”

“I could go and check. Will you wait?”

Beau waves an airy hand and pulls out his phone as if to read something there. He leans comfortably against the truck. Damn, he could lean for Louisiana if he had to.

Hannibal pushes open the door of the reception area. He’s a little surprised that there is no one behind the desk. He ducks his head back out of the main entrance and waves to Beau to attract his attention.

“There’s no one here. Are you sure?”

He looks back, there’s something. Something wrong about the silence. It isn’t a welcoming silence. It’s empty. In all the wrong ways. He doesn’t wait for an answer, just takes a sharp breath.

“Beau. Call the police and Jack Crawford. His number will be in Will’s cell. Do it now.”

Beau doesn’t even hesitate as he scrambles for the driver’s door and the cell phone still charging on the central console of the pick-up.

Hannibal turns straight back in to the room and looks around more carefully. It’s then that he sees the little octopus. It gives him a bad moment, of swerving swivelling vertigo. He picks Tentacles up and squeezes it lightly. That Abigail would choose to leave her favourite toy behind is unlikely. He pushes it into his pocket. He wishes sincerely and fiercely that he had his sidearm.

The door that leads deeper into the building has a pane of opaque glass. Behind it there is no square of light. When he tries the handle it sticks a little but opens after some pressure. Maybe a broken catch, or a thumb lock that didn’t quite snicker shut.

He pushes it open slowly and carefully. And listens.

.....

Ch 100

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

By the truck Beau manages Will's cell phone even if it's more complicated than his own and finally gets through to Jack Crawford who sounds as harried by the day's events as it is possible to be.

"Mr Crawford? This is Beau Graham, Will's pere. We're down at the opticians. I think Beverly Katz has the address from before. Hannibal just arrived. He thinks.." he pauses, unsure really what Hannibal thinks, except it's nothing anyways good. "He thinks there's something wrong here."

He stops then when Jack interrupts him. And listens. With hands that are shaking, just a little, he gets into the car, sticks the cell back on charge and then starts the engine. Over the speaker he tells Jack.

"Ok. I'm moving the truck down the road. 'Bout 250 feet. I don't know. There's a space I can pull into. You don't need to know. Damn. Sorry. I'm just.."

Jack interrupts him again, his voice thin and tinny through the cell phone speaker.

"You're doing fine Mr Graham. Just park up. We'll be with you soon. We're on silent approach. Don't want to spook the guy if we can avoid it. If there is even someone to spook. Ok? So, no heroics. You stay put. We're really close by. Gonna take us just a few more minutes."

Beau pulls into a space angled out from the sidewalk. He switches off the engine. Jack Crawford is still talking to him, and Beau realises it's to help keep him focussed and not panicked.

"I'm ok. Mr Crawford. I'm ok. I'm just waiting for y'all now. Ok. I'm staying in the truck."

In the Federal SUV Jack switches off the cell speaker and mic and turns to Bev who is driving, maybe five miles over the limit.

"Next exit, tight on the ramp. Then turn left."

She nods. Grits her teeth. Pushes maybe a little harder.

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Hannibal pushes the door open a little further and as he does so he drops down into a crouch. Sure it means a larger mass to hit, but most perps aren't figuring on a target three feet off the floor. People don't usually look down, or up. They're anticipating getting either a shot off at chest level, or if it's a knife or bat they're usually going for the softer parts of the torso or the head. Either way it's a good call. And gives him more oomph in his legs to power up from if it's going to get up close and personal fast.

The corridor isn't especially long but it has a couple of doors off one side and one off the other. There's a little light coming in through a side window further along, but overall it's gloomy. He listens again. He's going to have to check and clear each room as he goes. Even if there is nothing to hear from outside.

The first room turns out to be storage. Boxes and paper towels. A shelf with a kettle on it and a tiny mini fridge below. There's a row of mugs. 'Best dad'. 'Virginia Tech'. A couple that are probably trade gifts 'See Better With Hobbs'. 'Don't be deer sighted with Stag Lenses'. He closes the door but doesn't shut it entirely.

He opens the door on the other side of the corridor. A washroom. He checks it nevertheless. There's a tiny space behind the moulded vanity fitting that could hide someone little, but it's empty too. He takes what he hopes is a steadying breath. Closes that door behind him as well.

He takes the next two paces and realises the corridor has a branch just off to the left. It's empty and seems only to lead to a fire exit. The door is one of those ones opened with a crash bar. He takes a few steps down the corridor and presses against the wood of the door with the flat of his hand. Still closed properly. And he can see that there is an unbroken tag on the locking mechanism which shows no one has gone out this way recently.

All of which means that Will and Abigail are still inside the building. Probably behind the last door. He tries to recall what if anything Will said about the optometrist he saw when he got his glasses prescribed a few month's back. They'd all been so focussed in on the fact he felt better, and then on the news about Margot. A guy who was friendly. Maybe two partners in the business, a receptionist as well. Hannibal can't remember anything else about them at all.

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The news spreads quickly through the small town that the Feds are back. No one likes it as this kind of show of force can't presage anything good. When six SUVs, all tinted glass and glossy black paint park along South Main people gradually drift to the windows of stores and diners and the like, just to see what's happening. The arrival of State troopers and a gradual dispersal of personnel sees the locals herded away from the small building that houses the local opticians. Once the local PD shows up and gets people further away behind a cordon the rumours are flying.

Eventually Beau Graham is ushered into the same general space as Jack Crawford where he repeats the sequence of events. No one likes it that Will is inside. They hate that Abigail is too.

"Forty minutes maybe. Hannibal's been in there nearly twenty. I'm not sure. I'd imagine he's taking it real slow and careful."

Jack nods at him, and wonders if Hannibal has any hand to hand combat training. Of the recent no holds barred kind. Or at least recent. Right now he'd take recent. And maybe he's had hostage negotiation training too? Maybe. He thinks for a hot second about the nature of heroism in the field.

"He have a sidearm with him?"

Beau shakes his head.

"He came straight from Andrews. The rental up there is his. If he had it at all I think he left it. He doesn't usually carry it around Abigail. He usually gets a car with a lock box. You know?"

Jack nods and looks towards the front of the store. By now some of the troopers and his guys will have circled around the back.

"He got his cell?"

Beau nods.

“Yup. I got his number. But I’ve got Will’s cell here. He was out of power.”

Jack glances around and then beckons Jimmy over when he sees him.

“Jimmy? Take Mr Graham a little back from the line? Ok?”

As Jimmy makes his way towards them he mutters to Beau.

“Jimmy hates this kind of scene. Keep an eye on him maybe? He might faint.”

Beau gets it. Give him something to do. Give Jimmy something to do too. Not stupid of Jack Crawford. He hears Jack speak into some kind of collar mike.

“Everyone in position?”

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Hannibal stands at the final door and presses himself carefully against it. He listens hard. From within he catches maybe the faintest exchange of voices. Both male. Neither of them panicking. Not yet at least. But he’s also reasonably sure neither are Will’s voice.

He knows that once he gets the door open he’ll have only moments to deal with whatever is behind there. Both Abigail and Will might be restrained or in some kind of imminent danger. It all depends on the layout of the room, who is in there, what condition everyone is in. What they think they know. Realistically though they can’t be planning on staying in there. Which means they’ve either got a way out from that room or they’ll have to come through him. It’s what they might do before then that concerns him. Two live and conscious bodies are difficult to manage. Unconscious more so maybe. None of it is good. And he doesn’t know how the perp killed his victims. Will has never mentioned it.

He’s preempted when he hears a scuffle inside then an aggrieved shout.

“She bit me!”

“Hold her tighter. Fucks sake don’t..”

It might be his best chance so he slams open the door and assesses the scene as fast as he can; Abigail struggling and kicking and held by an older man who is clearly out of his depth. No knife. No gun. Just him holding her. Will held in an opticians chair, some kind of restraints, tape on his mouth, his eyes glazed, trying to stay conscious, lolling head. It’s the guy next to him that Hannibal can see is the problem. No gun. But something that glints in the light in his hand.

When Abigail sees him she struggles even harder and he thinks she must hit the guy holding her in the throat with a flailing arm. He grunts and drops her and scrabbles at his neck, bends double. Abigail screams. Hannibal shouts at her to run and get help. And thank goodness for residual obedience to parental authority because she does, past him and out the door.

It gets quieter. The guy on the floor that Abigail hit is still gasping for breath and seems to want nothing more than to be considered out of it. The other man though? He steps back from Will and gets the chair between him and Hannibal. He holds up his hand. Just to show Hannibal what he's holding. A scalpel. He smirks. Despite everything.

"You got a choice. Let me go, he might make it. Fight it out? Well, let's just say time is of the essence."

He indicates something on the floor and Hannibal doesn't look. It has to be something he dosed Will with. No point in looking right now. Won't help things. He makes a decision, save the heroics he thinks.

"I'll circle left. And I'll leave the doorway clear."

The man nods back at him and it takes maybe five seconds for the guy to be out and past him. Save the heroics Hannibal thinks, save them for others because if Jack Crawford is as good as he hopes all the guy can do is run into a cordon. He steps to the door and closes it and then locks it. No point inviting the guy straight back in once he realises he's cornered. If he turns back into the building. He feels his phone vibrate in his pocket. Text message.

>we've got her she's safe<

The man Abigail hit still lies on the floor writhing. Hannibal leaves him. It's a risk but a calculated one. Finally he gets to the thing the guy had nodded to on the floor. It's a half empty syringe. He casts around. Kicked into a corner he finds the vial. Reads it and tries not to panic. Grabs his cell and calls Jack back.

"Jack? You got him? I've got Will, he's been drugged. Tell me you've got EMS on standby. All-right then. Out front?"

He drops his cell and turns back to Will, gets the restraints undone, just zip ties and he probably cuts himself on them, but he barely notices. As he lifts him he doesn't bother with the tape. It's time he doesn't have. He just gets him out of the consulting room, along the corridor, through reception, out the front door and down the steps straight onto the EMS stretcher.

He hands over the vial and the lead looks at it and grimaces at him.

"Good thinking. How much?"

"Maybe half a syringe full. Standard size. I'm coming with you."

The EMS doesn't argue as they get Will into the back of the ambulance. He turns and waves at Jack, he can see Abigail being held by Beverly.

"Hospital. Beverly bring Abigail. I'm going with them."

In the ambulance he runs over the meds that Will is currently taking with the responder and listens as the EMS radios ahead. Watches as they set up an IV. He tries not to think about drug interactions and contraindications. He just holds Will's unresponsive hand. The time between when he stepped into the room and into the ambulance was maybe three minutes. Less possibly. It was fast. And Will had still been conscious when he opened the first door. It's not impossible. Tight but not impossible.

.....

Back at the scene Beverly holds Abigail close and carries her to the SUV. Jimmy and Beau are already there. Beau reaches for his grandaughter. And they get into the vehicle together. Abigail cries quietly. Beau does too. Big fat tears rolling down his old face. They hug each other as Brian gets into the driver's seat, Jimmy beside him in the front. Bev slides in the back alongside Abigail. She leans forwards in her seat.

"You know where we're going?"

Brian nods. And drives.

When they arrive Jack has clearly phoned ahead, or someone has, as they're ushered straight through the ER reception to a waiting room. Hannibal is already there and Abigail practically throws herself at him.

"They're looking after him, my darling girl. They're looking after him. You were so brave, we're so proud of you."

She buries her face in his neck and cries harder, arms tight round him. He pulls Tentacles from his pocket and she hugs the little creature close.

"Tentacles helped too. It's how I knew you were there. They showed me."

She cries a little more, and he rocks her against him. Above her head he makes eye contact with Beau who comes and sits beside him and just leans a little against Hannibal.

"What we have to do now? Just wait?"

Hannibal nods.

"Yes. Just wait."

Beau sighs.

"Waiting is the hardest part."

He reaches a hand across and grips Hannibal's hand where it's clasped round Abigail's back. The three of them sit there.

And wait.

.....

His eyelids seem terribly heavy and full of grit. But there's someone talking in his room so maybe he ought to wake up a little. He smiles, or at least he thinks he does. They're talking in French. Oh. His voice doesn't work quite right but he maybe manages.

"You here for the wedding?"

He must have made some noise as Simonetta grabs his hand and Mischa rushes to the door of the room. Oh. Hospital room. Well. That's novel. When did that? Oh. Wait. Oh. Abigail? God.

The thought barely has time to come into his consciousness before she's there and halfway across the room and on top of him, hugging him to death. He rubs her head. Her hair needs cutting. And Hannibal. Hannibal too. Looking so tired, and needing a shave, and wearing awful civvies Will has never seen before.

"Hey."

Ideally he'd like to sit up but that's not happening any time soon, why does he feel like his bones are full of lead? But Hannibal sits on the bed, manages not to squash Abigail and still manages to hold him close.

"My Will."

He smiles at that, still so possessive. That's good, he thinks, as he drifts off to sleep again.

.....

The next time he wakes up Will feels a little more alert. His eyes open more easily and he can see it's evening as there is only the faintest of light from outside washing through the half shuttered windows. Hannibal is sitting beside the bed, wearing different awful civvies, reading something on a tablet. He has shaved though.

"Hannibal?"

He doesn't recognise his own voice, but it's enough that Hannibal starts and then sets the tablet to one side on the small cabinet beside the hospital bed.

"Here, I can give you some ice chips."

The ice chips help with the dryness of his mouth but the way Hannibal is looking at him is everything.

"How long?"

Hannibal sighs and closes his eyes for a moment.

"Long enough. Too long. 96 hours until you woke up."

Will manages a nod and a regretful grimace.

"He stuck me didn't he. What was it?"

"Half a syringe of insulin. He's diabetic."

Oh. And Hannibal would have known exactly how that would go, could go.

"Jack get him."

"Yes."

Will closes his eyes. And manages to tighten his grip on the hand Hannibal is clutching his with.

“Gave everyone enough time to get here at least.”

He smiles when Hannibal snorts a small laugh.

“Mother forgot her new hat in all the fuss. She’s most annoyed.”

“Still want to marry me? I mean, it’s not exactly been a clear run.”

Hannibal doesn’t say anything so Will opens his eyes to look at him. Oh. Shit. Is he crying? He might be.

“Oh god. Hannibal. I’m sorry. I know, levity in the face of mortality. Not funny.”

Hannibal wipes his eyes roughly with the back of his hand.

“I cannot begin to say how awful it has been.”

He tries for some more words but they don’t come, so they sit there, hands clasped until Will drifts back off to sleep again.

.....

Two weeks later Will sets down a third mug of coffee on the bedside table and then flumps down on the bed. Their bed. He pokes Hannibal in the arm.

“Hannibal, for gods sake, you have to get up. You’re already running late. Why am I still the responsible adult round here.” He hears Hannibal mutter from under the pillow he has pulled over his face. “Whatever you just said I don’t care. Coffee is on the nightstand. Abigail is up and dressed, Mischa just called, she’s being a tree. Hannibal! Come on.”

Hannibal catches him by the wrist and pulls him down so he’s sprawled over him. Will tries not to smile and to keep up with the badgering.

“I thought you wanted to get married? New beginnings and all that. New chapter. Something we write together.. yada yada, all that mushy stuff.”

Hannibal laughs and pushes the pillow off his face.

“Yes. All right. And thank you for the coffee.” He focuses better and frowns as his glance takes in all of Will. “You look very nice. Oh. You’re already dressed. Good god how late am I?”

Will leans in and kisses him briefly.

“We’re going in 25 minutes. I told you an hour ago.”

“Damn.”

The next twenty minutes see Hannibal showered, shaved and dressed in his best dress uniform, with coffee drunk and two slices of toast hastily eaten.

Will sits at the kitchen table and smiles at the rapid progress Hannibal makes through each stage, offering a minimal running commentary each time some new element is accomplished. At least the dogs are boarded out for the duration, and the family has all been persuaded to let them have this one night alone in the house before the actual day. So it is just them to bear witness to Hannibal's not quite but nearly panic.

Two minutes before the deadline Hannibal stands at the front door, pats his side pocket where he has the rings and the card case, takes a deep breath, and looks at his watch.

"Well, there we are. Are you coming? The rest of our life awaits."

Will smiles and gets up from the table. He puts the two mugs and plates into the sink. And then joins Hannibal at the doorway.

"Sure. I'm ready. Shall we?"

They cross the threshold together.

Chapter End Notes

A huge thank you to everyone who has read. And to all those who regularly messaged to remind me to get on and post the next chapter. Thank you for all the comments, reblogs, retweets and kindness. It's always tricky to name particular people as I'd hate to omit anyone. But you, and you, and you! And you! Thank you.

For those who want the whole wedding and the next bit, there's a part two that features four weddings, a funeral, the court case for MothMan, further revelations and, well, I don't want to spoil the surprises. That will start posting at the end of the year. I promised I'd finish ten fics this year before I began posting anything else. This is number five, so I'm on target.

I'm currently in Georgia in the Southern USA. Last week I drove some of the routes MothMan and the team would have taken in this story as well as all round Baltimore and Wolf Trap. In particular I did the route Hannibal takes in the last couple of chapters, just to check it could be done. Phew. The things we do for research.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!